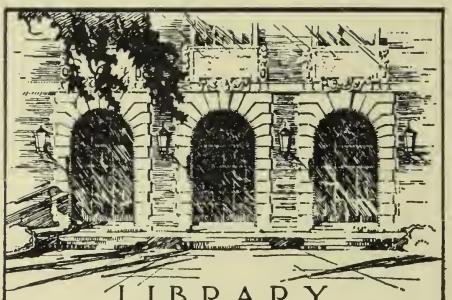

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THE CHURCH YEAR

A SERIES OF SERMONS

FOR THE

SACRED SEASONS

BY

VERY REV. JAS. CARMICHAEL, M.A., D.C.L.,

DEAN OF MONTREAL.

MONTREAL

W. FOSTER BROWN & CO.

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SERMONS.

1. Advent .....The Welcome Christ.
2. " .....Christ the Victor.
3. " .....Faith and Hope.
4. " .....Antichrist.
5. " .....Preparedness for Christ's Coming.
6. " .....Obedience.
7. Sunday before Christmas.....The Eternal Sacrament.
8. Christmas .....The Visible and Invisible World.
9. " .....The Virgin Mother's Musings.
10. " .....The Child Christ.
11. Epiphany.....The Original Revelation.
12. " .....Vengeance left with God.
13. " .....Praise.
14. Lent .....The Great Temptation.
15. " .....Present Retribution.
16. " .....Future Retribution.
17. " .....Sifting by Satan.
18. Good Friday.....The Great Substitute.
19. " .....The Wide Nature of Divine Forgiveness.
20. " .....Darkness Over the Whole Land.
21. Sunday before Easter.The Real Man.
22. Easter.....The Awakening Touch of Christ.
23. " .....The Reality of the Resurrection.
24. " .....The Joy of Resurrection.
25. " .....The First Fruits of the Harvest.
26. " .....The First Resurrection Thought of Christ
27. " .....The Reality of Heaven.
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29. Whitsunday.....The Holy Ghost.
30. Trinity Sunday.....The Necessity of Mystery.
31. General Subjects ....The Family that Jesus Loved.
32. " ....The Elder Brother.
33. " ....Jacob at Jabbok.
34. " ....Ministerial Responsibility.
35. " ....Agnosticism.
36. " ....Church Re-Union.
37. " ....Perfect Through Suffering.

ADVENT.

"His Name shall endure for ever; His Name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in Him. All nations shall call Him blessed."

—Psalm lxxii: 17.

In the onward progress of the great stream of this world's life, it is wonderful how it carries with it, cleansed and purified, our conceptions and thoughts as to those passed out of our social life into the great unexplored world beyond. Time, moulded by Christianity, is one of the most charitable forces on the earth; so much so, that a man must have been wholly bad to have avoided its regenerative benedictions—a Nero, or a Caligula.

And this is true also of the lasting appreciation that time exhibits towards the intellectual power of past heroes. All the really

great, the giants of past thought and science, are greater to-day than they were in their living prime. They have grown with the growth of the world, their dross is flung aside, and the fine gold that was part and parcel of them has not only been retained, but has been polished and burnished. Others have followed in their track of thought—have manufactured beautiful things out of their old rough ideas; but as the modern disciple has been earning trophies for himself, he has brought to the front the old hoary teacher, and the dead and dumb and forgotten have shared the glories of the living voice. Thus, on the whole, it may be said that all that is great grows greater, all that is true grows truer, all that is pure grows purer, in any one great individual teacher as time rolls on; and the dead who have done good — public good—are often greater to-day than when they lived and taught.

Examples of this are neither few nor far between. In a great wave of commemorative excitement that rolled over the world of letters some years ago, commemorating the

introduction of printing, men, you remember, did not glory in modern printing, but the press teemed with laudations of Gutenberg, Coster and Caxton. These shadows unconsciously had grown with the growth of the art of printing; every improvement, every new piece of mechanism, everything that tended to elevate and develop that art, grouped themselves around these old shadows of the past, and when the commemorative hour struck, the skilled mechanics of the present day, the inventors of minute and elaborate improvements, were positively nowhere —no one gave them a thought; the Great Dead filled the stage; the eyes of the audience were fixed on them, although it is questionable whether, if it were possible, any printer of the day would employ any one of the three great primitive men as a practical press hand. But they had grown with the growth of the art that they had invented or introduced. The roughness and coarseness of their work and the imperfections of their machines were forgotten. They stood before the public with five centuries of progressive triumphs as a background, and they

were tenfold greater men in the nineteenth century than when they struck out or developed the magnificent idea of printing by separate type in the fifteenth.

And so with the Luther commemoration held some years ago. Time has taught Protestantism to gather up and prize the fine gold of the man and to forget what from an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Congregational standpoint, is open to stricture at this moment in his views, and to regard such things as motes in a brilliant sunbeam. Luther opened a sealed Bible and struck the chains from enslaved personal judgment of holy things, and he stands to-day with three centuries of emancipated religious thought behind him—a giant. He has grown with the growth of his own work, and must grow as it grows.

Now, exactly the same thought applies to the Lord Jesus Christ, although in a far grander and nobler sense.

In the first place, it would be impossible that Christ could ever come again as first He came. I mean He could never come as the despised Christ. For Christ could not come

again to you, to me, apart from the nineteen centuries of experience that the world has had of Christ, and those nineteen centuries of experience would be added to my own in the Christ that would come. If Luther came again you could not think of him as the "solitary monk"; you would be forced to think of him as "the solitary monk that shook the world," and that shaking of the world has taken the solitary aspect from the monk, and has made him a perfectly new character. The solitary monk nailed his ninety-five theses on the gate of the Church at Wittenberg; but can you call him solitary to-day, when you remember emperors and the great of the earth assembled some years ago to do honour to his name—that poets and orators and preachers combined to laud and praise his memory, and when that memory could gather on religious platforms men of antagonistic views, singing in harmony at least his intellectual praises.

Well, so it is with the Lord Jesus. Never again can we have the Jesus of Nazareth, of Capernaum, of the deep blue lake, or the

hill-side covered with scarlet flowers. All that was real—it can never be so again.

In one sense this was the solitary Jesus; but the Jesus of to-day is pre-eminently He who has shaken the world, whose name is above every name, whose laws and words lie at the base of all civilized society, and whose influence is ceaselessly fresh in its revivifying and enlightening power. The Jesus of to-day is a conqueror, with an army at his back that counts its hosts by millions; an army drawn from every country, that speaks every language, that is recruited from all grades of civilization, and that numbers in its ranks kings of the earth and the lowliest of their servants. The Jesus of to-day is a conqueror who has survived battle-fields on which his foes lie forgotten; who has beaten rebels that He might pardon them, and possessed countries solely that He might bless them. The Jesus of to-day is the hidden soul and spring of every work of mercy and goodness and purity, that lifts civilization above barbarism. He stands alone and matchless, with nineteen centuries

of all that is good and true and god-like and powerful behind him—"Head of the Church triumphant."

Well, if He came again—what then? Just what the Bible tells you. Mark you, He could not come as once He was; He must come in power, if nothing more than the accumulated power of the centuries behind him; and that coming again, I hold, would not produce in a startled world a duplicate rejection of the past, but it would be hailed with a shout of triumph by the holy and the pure, and with fear and trembling by the ungodly and unjust.

Some modern writers, whose apparent candour is alone excelled by their casuistry, fling before the Christian Church the question, "If Christ came again, the Son of Mary, how would you receive Him? What would you do with Him? You would put Him out of your synagogues and refuse to hear Him." The answer, of course, boldly takes for granted what the writers apparently desire should take place; but I hold that all experience teaches that such an answer is outside of all probability.

I speak with all reverence when I say that I earnestly believe that if the Lord Jesus who lived for us and died for us, the Lord Jesus who for nineteen centuries has been fostering and developing all that is good and holy and pure in man, He whose mere name has made death-beds by the millions happy, He whose promises have comforted broken hearts beyond all count, and dried the ceaseless tears of an ever suffering world, and lifted our hearts and hopes above ourselves, out into the land of God—I say it with all reverence, that if the Lord Jesus stood suddenly in our streets, in the unimpeachable splendour of his divine nature, the whole world would turn its eyes towards the New Jerusalem of the West, and by millions they would come—the noblest men, the purest women, from the east and west and north and south, to bend the knee and kiss the hem of the garment and worship the King in the beauty of holiness. Yes, for there is a depth of religion and devotion in the world beyond our realization. I believe the Lord would be hailed with shouts of joy, that strong men who have prayed to Him in

whispers would weep from the happiness of merely looking at Him, and that one great throb of devoted love, beginning with childhood and running up to old age, would shake the moral world to its very centre. Then would be seen what some men doubt exists, the real spiritual force of personal faith and trust—faith wide as the ocean, deep as its depths; and love—love that we have never dreamed of in our wildest dreams.

But should we not have our Sadducees doubting and asking questions—"Art thou the Christ? Who art thou?"

It may be so, but be sure of this, it would not be a day of lengthened, captious questionings. For one that would ask "Art thou Christ?" thousands would bend their heads terror-stricken and ashamed and say, "It is Christ!" Men would wake up to the fact that He had come, that He had come in power; that the Christ whom nineteen centuries had worshipped was a living reality; that He was not only living, but that He was here. And hence, with some—with some who through life had not only rejected Him, but had mocked and scoffed at his

being, had ridiculed his words, had jested over his commandments, had used his name purposely in awful blasphemies, had libelled his life and denied his godliness—from such the very words of Scripture itself might ring forth, "Rocks fall on us. Hills cover us. For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Brethren, if God's word be true, all this will be. Christ will come again. Now He is to us by faith a living Christ, though unseen. Some time He will be to us a living Christ, seen through eye, heard by ear, and touched, maybe, by hand. As once He lived on earth, so will He live again. Not the Christ of humiliation, but the Christ of glory, of triumph, of victory. God alone knows when He will come, but of this be sure, the longer He delays his coming, the deeper, nobler, grander will be the love of him in the hearts of those who really and truly long for his appearance. For time will do for Jesus what it does for all the great, it will make his loveliness more lovely to those who value love, his purity more dazzling to those who value purity, his truth more spot-

less to those who value truth; and though the last days may be days of doubt and unbelief, be assured of it, never will Christ be more valued by those who really love Him than in that day when the sun will rise to welcome his approach, and the sign of the Son of Man will be seen in the Heavens.

ADVENT.

"And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, WHO IS THIS?"

—Matt. xxi:10.

Outside of one of the gates of Jerusalem there is an excited, joyous, ever increasing crowd of pilgrims, shouting praises loud and long to the Lord Jesus, who, seated on an ass, is journeying on towards death and judgment, yet for a few short moments riding like a king in triumph. "Master," said some Pharisees near to Jesus, "rebuke thy disciples, order quietness, all this noise and shouting are unseemly and offensive." "Nay," says Christ, "I will not. A faint glimmer of the truth is forcing itself through the dull brains of these people. I tell you that if they held their peace the very stones would cry out in shame to welcome me." On he rides,

midst the shouting crowd ; a crowd ever growing denser and denser, till as it pours through the city gate the cry goes up from street and roofs and crowded windows : " Who is this ? Who is he ? Where does he come from ? What does he come for ?" This, of course, from the crowd inside the city—the jostling, prying, inquisitive crowd, wanting to know everything and ready to accept for the moment as true anything, whilst He rides on, the only calm being in the midst of all the turmoil, on to certain betrayal and death. About him, hemming him in, running before him, pressing him from behind, the crowd, now grown into a multitude, shouts in wilder excitement than ever, " Hosanna to the Son of David : Hosanna in the highest : Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," whilst still the enquiry ever growing rolls on, " Who is he ? What is he ? " and He rides on as if the streets were empty, on to judgment and death, on to the cry towards which his whole life had been making, " It is finished."

The scene is but a picture of a living reality that has been ever since those streets were

crowded, and ever will be, on to the awful end of present earthly things. There ever has been, and ever will be, the noisy, tumultuous crowd crying "Hosanna" to-day, and "Crucify him" to-morrow." There ever has been, and ever will be, the jostling, swaying, inquisitive crowd, treading on each other, thrusting out their crane-like necks and straining their wondering eyes and shouting or whispering the questions: "Who is this? What is he? Where does he come from? What is he doing?" and there ever has been, and ever will be, till the heavens are opened and the armies of the living God pour forth, the calm, undismayed, undaunted Jesus, holding on his way, undeterred by tumult or questionings, riding on, as if in the emptiness of space and silence of night, as if no power opposed, as if his way were always open—on, on to the final and irresistible victory when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

The marvel of our Lord's progression through time as the risen Saviour is his ignoring of obstacles: nothing has ever daunt-

ed him—He simply rides on. He has ever been greater than the Church that He founded, greater than the greatest movement within that Church, greater than the greatest agents He ever called into being, for each and all of these at times have swayed to either side of obstacles, or fallen fainting in their presence. But nothing has dimmed or daunted Christ. Through the long history of his Church, through its fevers, and faintings and failures He has remained the same; the one point towards which the Church in its dismemberment has ever rallied; the uncaptured and uncapturable standard of eternal rectitude and purity; the personal, living, risen Jesus, the same "yesterday, to-day and forever," the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending of all God's purposes for good to man —on, on, He has ever ridden and rides to lasting and eternal victory, the unconquered and unconquerable Christ.

Think of the obstacles that lay in his path.

First, the great human heart with some good in it, no doubt, the last lingering remnants of the divine image, but with a tide of power, throbbing and beating in natural re-

jection of every doctrine that the Lord Jesus ever preached and taught. The lust of the eye and the pride of life, the selfishness of every born soul, the love of riches for one's own pleasure, the love of ambition for one's own glory, the tendency to use life for one's own individual enjoyment, the hatred of responsible thought as to what shall be hereafter, and above all the gaining of our own ends at any cost, however dreadful,—every one of these feelings natural to man in some shape or form, rallied against Christ and barred and blocked his way and cried "Halt!" with pointed spear to check his progress; but on He rode, rides and will ride till the great human heart, chastened for its sin, confesses him as Lord.

Think again of the opposition from fickleness and falseness. The crowd shouting "Hosanna" to-day, and "Crucify him," to-morrow, has never wholly dispersed through the long ages. Again and again has the Lord been wounded afresh in the house of his own friends, crucified afresh by "Hosanna"-shouters, betrayed by generations of Judases, denied by generations of Peters, and deserted by

generations of disciples. Again and again have the world, the flesh and the devil, invaded the holy of holies, and captured young life and old as it knelt at the very foot of the cross itself, and again and again has the Lord been sold for far less and far baser coin than thirty pieces of silver, and still He rides on and will ride on conquering and to conquer till the end comes.

Think of the opposition from mockers and blasphemers, from unwilling and willing doubters, from half-hearted followers who shrink into their shell at every blow aimed at their Lord's position as prophet, priest and king; the vast crowd, through all the ages, of doubters, sceptics, cowards or foes, who never cease to ask in blasphemy, mockery or honest doubt: "Who is this? Why should we be called upon to give him our allegiance?" Again and again the Church has reeled under such questionings; again and again every claim to divinity our Lord has made has been criticized and sifted, tossed here and there, with wildest freedom in the fervor of polemical debate; his miracles denied or watered down into nothing, his wisdom as a teacher

attacked, the awful value of his death, and cross and passion brought down to mere example or wholly denied, and his resurrection from the dead spoken of as a dream of hysterical enthusiasm; and yet, on He rides calm, undaunted, irresistible, through the power of his own divinity and the righteousness of his own cause; on He rides with face turned towards that supreme moment yet to come when "the mystery of God will be finished."

To me the history of Christ himself, and Christ in his Church, so far from weakening my faith, strengthens it as every fresh page is turned. There is not a stronghold of Christ faith, and Christ life in the world that has not been won in the face of the most tremendous opposition, if nothing else; the opposition of the unbaptized, unregenerated heart of human nature everywhere. I bend before this divine force, which, facing an antagonistic world, slowly it may be, but surely, captures its enemies, host by host, and builds up its power from the ranks of its foes. I tremble not with others at the breaking down in the present day of the ancient barriers erected

against ungodliness, and the outrush of waters of strife and unbelief and doubt; for I know that all this is an old story worn threadbare in the telling; a phase of opposition that in varied shape has occurred again and again, and will occur on to the very end. But this I also know, that no antagonism, however fierce or fatal, can crush out Christ. The fire of man's hatred cannot burn him, the waters of man's strife cannot drown him, the sword of man's wrath cannot pierce him, the bitterness of man's tongue cannot injure him, the wild vagaries of man's brain cannot weaken him, simply because He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the incarnate Deity, the Creator and Maker who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty. Against him from the very foundation of his Church the ocean of evil in savage tides has flung its angry and corrosive waters; but not one hair's breadth of the wave-beaten rock has fallen into the depths beneath, because "that rock is Christ," the great, immovable divine rock, that casts its shadow over weary lands. On, on, He rides through crowds and questionings, millenniums fall behind him, old foes

with new faces spring up to stay him ; Satan himself will rise to check him at the last, but on He rides, till the only conqueror is Jesus who lived and died and rose, and is come again to claim his own and reign for ever and ever. In this high hope let Advent dawn on us. Conscious of our own sins and weaknesses, let us strike the note of victory not through ourselves, but through the Victor, who never yet has been vanquished. "He that is for us is greater than all against us." We can never wholly be conquered if we keep close to Him ; for although all around him is noise of battle and shock of conflict, behind him is victory, and before him is victory, and they who fight with him and for him will not be forgotten when the spoil is divided.

ADVENT.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Romans, xv: 4.

The Holy Scriptures are the sole and only revelation we possess, which tells us of the being, the person, the life, the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from Scripture, the direct written evidence for his existence is very slight, and there is no direct evidence as to his acts and sayings. Hence the supreme value of the Holy Scriptures, and the necessity for a Christian knowledge of what they teach. If, as we believe, all salvation is centred in and goes forth from Jesus Christ, and the Holy Scriptures are the only documents that testify of him, then, just in proportion as we value the gift

of salvation, so will we value the documents that testify of that gift.

Now, out of the many objections raised against the Scriptures in past and present times, there is none more unjust than that which asserts that they are palpably deficient in those forms of instruction which would naturally beget, in the human mind, positive and undoubted certainty. If there be a hell, it is said, why should room be left for the creation of a doubt in connection with it? If there be a heaven, why has it not been described in such a way as to prevent men rejecting or theorizing about it? If there be one divine Church—God's ordained machinery for carrying out his will, why were rules not laid down for the life of that Church which would write blasphemy on every act of schism; and make disloyalty to it unmistakably criminal? Then why was not the origin of evil clearly explained? Why was not the account of creation written in such a way that no loop-hole could exist for scientific or other objections? Why was not this done, and that done, in just the way that we would have done it, if affairs had

originally lain in our hands? This style of objection, I say, is manifestly unjust because it ignores the whole underlying object of the Holy Scriptures as a series of closely connected volumes, namely, the cultivation in man of a vigorous faith in God, and of a lasting hope that reaches into eternity, springing out of this faith. Man is naturally a being formed to believe something, but he is also naturally a desponding being, a strange mixture of faith and doubt; and Scripture is meant by God to be the great human tonic, building up faith and hope, and through these the whole man himself. Let weak man take the tonic and it will develop a faith and hope that will make him strong and healthy.

And yet this fundamental object of Scripture is constantly ignored, for out of all my reading I have never yet come across a volume written by any man of note, or indeed by any one, that assailed the principle of drawing out the faith and hope of man in connection with religion, and yet this is the one and only principle that runs through and permeates every page of Scripture.

"The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." What did that draw out? Faith and hope. "Make thee an ark of "gopher wood, and I will make a covenant "with thee, and thou and thy family shall be "saved." What did that draw out? Faith and hope. "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and I will make of thee a great nation." What did that draw out? Faith and hope. As Israel entered into the waters of the Red Sea, nothing but faith and hope gave them courage to march through. As they willingly obeyed the ceremonial law of Moses, faith and hope alone made that law of value. As in after days they bent in obedience under the ringing eloquence of prophets, or as captives, looked forward to re-settlement in their land, faith and hope again asserted their powers. As the Virgin Mother received her doom-like message, as the wise men came travelling over desert sands, as the aged Simeon blessed the Child, as the holy Master called his disciples to him; as his bitter cry went up from the cross, and above all, as He gave to his regathered friends the great commission,

"Go ye forth into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and lo, I am with you always to the end of the world," what were the powers that gave life to these things? Surely faith and hope, and nothing else. I look in vain for certainty in any one of them, save Christ. What certainty had Adam, Noah, Abraham or Israel? What certainty had the Virgin Mary that shame would not follow her unique and miraculous motherhood? What certainty had the disciples as they scattered themselves over the then known world to win it for Christ? None; but all had lasting and abiding faith in God and hope in God; faith that, no matter what obstacle presented itself, God's purpose would finally prevail, and hope that it would prevail gloriously, brilliantly, in a God-like manner. Abraham, what madness causes you to leave your gods and land? What are your reasons? I have no reasons: "God tells me to go (faith wonderful!) and I can feel that the destiny that awaits me beyond will prove in every way a blessing" (hope, marvellous hope but not one thread, humanly speaking, of actual positive cer-

tainty !) Blind faith, with hope as a light to lighten the darkness ; for if faith is the lamp, hope is the flame.

Now, no reader of the Holy Scriptures can deny that these principles form the foundation teaching of each divine volume. There must have been a divine object in this : what was that object ? Surely to teach mankind the doctrine, that God rules ; that his will is supreme, that no voice is higher than his, and that, as the creatures of his creation, our duty is simply to know his will and obey it, leaving it to Him as "God over all, blessed forever," to bring about his will in his own way, in his own time, and as ever to Him seems best. And hence, God has always trained man to this passive obedience, never wholly explaining anything, never arguing, never laying the whole plan of his dealings in strict detail before us, but saying, "This I "tell you is a truth ; accept that truth ; follow "it wherever it leads you, into temporary "darkness, into sorrow, into earthly or mental "difficulty ; never mind, follow it on. Have "faith, for I am your God ; have hope, for all "will be brightness yet, to them that trust

me." Hence, Abraham asks no title deeds of Canaan from God; he trusts Him, and if he had asked them, never would Israel have been God's chosen people.

Now, why is not this principle pursued by God towards man assailed? The Book that works out the principle is assailed: the principle is either ignored or forgotten in the battle of words? I will tell you. No man dare assail it, for the principle is rooted in the soil of justice and judgment. It is the most correct and workable principle known to man. Where are the heads of families that would train their children without faith in themselves, as heads and rulers and guides of youth? And where are the fathers and mothers that would tear hope out of their own hearts with regard to their own children? Faith and hope work with you, work in your own houses. You cannot have certainty, you live by faith and are thankful for hope. Hence if faith and hope support your home, why may not faith and hope support your religion? I dread the consequences for the man, who by word or example would warn his children against faith and hope, and

teach them only to trust in certainty. Certainty! Take your own temper in presence of your children, uncertain-tempered man—man of gladsome eyes and laughing mouth to-day, and raging passion to-morrow! The principles you instil into your children teach them not to believe in you, not to trust you, and worse still, never to hope that they can believe in you. No, you can never assail faith and hope within your own homes and yet have them happy.

But why does not science assail the principle of God's method of teaching man? Well, first, because it is outside of its field; and secondly, it could not do so consistently, for as science in every direction works out its discoveries, it does so solely on the lines of faith and hope. Mr Darwin, for instance, gathered a mass of facts together, and then said, "What shall I do with them?" His common sense said, "Group them together in the shape of a reasonable hypothesis." What is an hypothesis? Some line of argument, in which a person has faith and which, he hopes, will ultimately be proved true. Mr. Darwin lived long enough to feel

that his hypothesis did not work exactly right, and his friend and successor, Mr. Wallace, feels the same ; for someway the scum of society, world over, is working its way to the top. But Darwin died in the faith and hope that natural selection would yet right itself; and Mr. Wallace thinks that if society could only be persuaded to adopt the principles of socialism, laid down by Mr. Bellamy in his strange book entitled "Looking Backward," it could help a law of nature to do its work better than nature itself—an exercise of faith and hope equal to St. Paul's. No, science cannot assail faith and hope, for both are doors into whatever scientific certainty positively exists.

Hence with St. Paul, we may fall back on the Holy Scriptures of the living God, and feel that what they demand from us is nothing strange. "For whatsoever things were written afore-time were written for our learning that we, through patience (which is faith tested and tried) and through comfort of the Holy Scriptures, might have hope" — not doubt, nor misgivings, nor debatings—but strong and vigorous hope ;

hope, that all the sorrows and contrarieties and mysteries of life would in time right themselves ; and that God's hidden plan in all its magnificence of detail, would lie out clear before our minds, and that in everything God would finally be justified ; hope, that in the day so dimly revealed ; when He who came to die for the world, shall come again to claim his own, we shall see him as he is, and "be forever with the Lord ;" hope, that even before that day, when we draw near death, our closing words below may be, "Even so Lord Jesus, come quickly.

ADVENT.

He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.
1 John, ii: 22.

In connection with the second coming of our Lord, a character is introduced into Holy Scripture called Antichrist, implying an opponent of Christ. The actual name is only used by St. John, and is only used by him from a doctrinal standpoint. "He is Antichrist," writes John, "that denieth the Father and the Son, and who also denies that Jesus Christ the Son of God came in the flesh."

The same character, however, is plainly pictured by such Old Testament prophets as Ezekiel and Daniel, and is drawn in vivid colours by St. Paul, who pictures him as "one whose coming is after the working of Satan;" he calls him "the wicked one," who shall put himself "in the place of God," and as

such seek to crush Christianity to the earth.

Associated with this being, and as the result of his wide-spread power, Scripture represents a time of terrible persecution, misery and woe, a culmination of all miseries that the world has ever suffered from, war, famine, pestilence, outrageous cruelty, and the most audacious reign of blasphemy that this world has ever witnessed St. John, in the Book of the Revelation, describes this being as making war with the saints, as murdering all who would not acknowledge him. He pictures the city or seat of his power as being drunken with the blood of the saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, as the vile, abominable city of the latter days, whose sins and iniquities heaped together seem to reach to Heaven—the cruel, hateful reservoir of concentrated wickedness, into which was poured the blood of prophets, and of the saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth. And this season of world-wide misery — this time of antichristian power is also pictured by our Lord himself as the "great tribulation," the like of which was not from the beginning of the world nor

ever shall be; when the people of Christ shall be hated for the sake of Christ; when iniquity shall abound, when brother shall betray brother unto death, when licentiousness and luxury shall rule in homes, when even amongst Christians dulness, deadness, sleepiness shall reign, and the general tendency of religious life shall be so lax and loose that even Christ prospectively asked, "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?"

Such an awful pictured panorama of darkness and desolation, of blasphemy and moral and spiritual bankruptcy, all culminating either in one being, or in a system, or in the spirit of the age—it matters not which, so long as it is there—seems to be the utter annihilation of all that Christ has ever accomplished through his death, and cross, and passion, and blessed intercession. Where is Christ? one may ask. Is Christ dead, or if living and conscious of these horrors, why does He so strain the faith of the saints that have kept the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus? Why is He so careless of his Church's sorrows that the very saints

in Paradise might well cry out, as the martyred dead pour in in crowds from earth below to join them, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" or that the living themselves, doomed to the awful choice of denying Christ or losing life, should not appeal to Him almost in words of rebuke, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, awake, put on Thy strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, why sleepest Thou? O, Lord, cast us not off forever." It is the patient waiting—the strained waiting of the saints that has given us such cries as these; and as one thinks of the darkness and desolation yet to come, one sees easily how such cries, born of aching hearts and not of audacity, might ring up from earth to Heaven and storm the very throne of God.

There was a moment in the long ages of progressive creation when God said, "Let there be light, and there was light,"—the moment of his will; before it all was darkness; after it, in the very next moment, light

was everywhere. Again, there was a moment when a young mother in Bethlehem held out her weak hands to hold her new-born Infant. The motherhood of the world had borne children and hugged them to its breast since Eve first looked on Cain; but out of the millions of mothers this was the Mother who was fore-ordained by God from all eternity to look upon that very Child, at that very moment, and in that very place. God has his moments for doing things; "hath He not said and shall he not do it? hath He not spoken and shall He not make it good?"

And here in this scene of culminating misery God has his great moment to strike in with terrible and irresistible effect, and in doing so to let loose on the giant power of evil, which like a wild beast harries and worries and tears the Church of God, a far greater power than evil in its most triumphant days has ever realized. Whether St. John meant his Apocalyptic pictures to be accepted as literal facts, or to be taken figuratively, matters but little, as long as we realize that there will be a moment of God, when the

power of all Heaven will pour forth to the rescue of God's saints; when,like the bursting-forth of stored-up oceans, the barriers of divine forbearance will be overleaped, and this whole earth will be flooded with a vindication of the honour, the devotion, the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As sure as ever Antichrist is coming, so surely Jesus Christ is coming, and in the coming of Jesus Christ is total, overwhelming and eternal victory.

Every prophet that has written on this moment of God has caught the fire of the same inspired idea. The Heavens are opened and the armies of the living God pour forth, army on army, host on host, following in brilliant myriads the lead of Him who, seated on the white horse, goes forth to battle, conquering and to conquer. And when we ask the name of Him who leads, clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, the answer rolls back, "He is the Word of God. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Then comes, not warfare, but overwhelming, irresistible destruction. Antichrist is destroyed; the great seat of his earthly power

—the city which reigned over the kings of the earth—meets its judgment in one hour; the battle of the great day of God Almighty bursts like a thunder-clap on the great earth powers of allied evil, and their kingdom and dominion and the greatness of their power under the whole heaven are consumed and destroyed, whilst the armies of the living God follow Him whose look is judgment, whose progress is one continuous victory, and whose voice rolls forth the death doom of every foe as He tells the world that "the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come." No longer need the Church cry out, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord," for the Lord is everywhere—the one only power before whom all men bow, and who once, and only once, in the whole ministry of his incarnate being, treads the wine-press of the fierceness and the wrath of Almighty God.

Now, as I said, it matters little whether these descriptive scenes are figurative, or literal and realistic. If figurative, Scripture means them to be figurative of facts, facts that will form part of the history of this world.

It may be that Antichrist is the full force of concentrated evil bursting out into open flower; that these armies and hosts and this giant city are but figures of the tremendous power of united evil in the latter days—but what matters, so long as the great fact remains that denial of God, and hatred of Christ, and crowned sin, and the sword dipped with the blood of the saints of God, will mark the dreadful hours of darkness that precede the dawn of the judgment of Antichrist? Again, it may be that our eyes may not see the armies of Heaven pouring forth in their brilliant millions, or Him who leads them—what matters it, so long as the great scriptural fact remains, that the power of the living and glorified Jesus will beat down Satan under his feet, will strike the chains of sin from captive prisoners, will flood this purified and regenerated world with light and brightness, will cripple death and wipe away tears and bind up broken hearts; will glorify goodness, and honour honesty, and crown the consciousness of right, and fill this world with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

For this coming of Christ, mark you, is not the coming which calls to final judgment and the great white throne, but Christ coming to claim the world he purchased with his own blood, to inaugurate the time when Christ the king will rule in righteousness, and the keynote of his rule shall be "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people saith your God. Your warfare is accomplished, your iniquity is pardoned."

There is something grand and God-like here. This earth that God pronounced "very good" will not be left to Satan to wreck and ruin. Our manhood made "in God's own image" will not forever be defiled. This earth will yet be Christ's before the judgment, and the great white throne. I love to think of it, and I thank God for the reality of the thought. This world is a glorious world as God made it, and to have it brought back to what he meant it to be, is one of the happiest thoughts in scripture. I love to think that the great evening of its life will be one of placid undisturbed beauty, of freedom from the awful evils that now rend and tear it and make it wretched and miserable, of joy and

gladness. As one's heart grows sick and heavy and the lamps of faith grow dim, I love to fall back in thought on words like these, and to conjure up before me the calm, restful picture that such words call into being. "My people shall dwell in peaceable habitations, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

ADVENT.

But of that day and hour knoweth no one. Watch therefore for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.

Matt., xxiv: 36.

This command is not only to be regarded as a great world-wide one. We miss its power wholly if we do not realize its personal character. We are to be ready trusting in Jesus, doing our duty, found at our posts, waiting dutifully, watching dutifully. We may be ready, sleeping peacefully, for the wise virgins were ready although they slept. There is no divine law against watching and resting so long as "our lights are burning." But I am to be ready, you are to be ready, for at such an hour as I think not, at such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man may come to you, the Son of Man may come to me. Now how is this ? How can Christ come to the individ-

ual apart from coming in open judgment of the world? The answer to this question is to be found in the great words of comfort recorded in the 14th chapter of St. John's Gospel, where our Saviour says, "If I go to my Father, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." This coming, this taking of Peter to himself, and John to himself, and Matthew to himself—what did it mean? It meant that the death of Peter was the coming of Christ to Peter; it meant that when the brutal mob stoned Stephen to death, and the martyr, looking through a mist of blood, saw Jesus standing at God's right hand, that sight, seen through a rift in the closing death pang — that sight was the coming of Christ to Stephen.

And your death will be the coming of Christ to you; my death the coming of Christ to me, if only we are faithful and dutiful. Yet even here, as in judgment, there is still God's great secret; for who can tell the day and hour of his death?

Now look at this practically and physically.

It is a physical fact that we all must die. Fortunately, providentially in one sense, we are not always thinking of this startling fact. Life rushing on through us like a river, carries us with it beyond the thought, and life with its systematic duties keeps it from monopolizing the fore-ground of our anxieties; but the fact remains nevertheless, and a time will come when not one being in this congregation will be alive. We shall be wiped out of life as if we never existed—one by one, we shall drop off, old, middle-aged, young, until at last, all will be gone, not one solitary representative will remain. "A truism," you say; yes, but sometimes these "truisms" are terrible things, as this one certainly is. Not one will at last be left. The river dries up for all, the clock stops its beat and there is no key to wind it; Death rides over us rough-shod, and there is no pity in the rider—he is inexorable, remorseless.

Look at another physical fact. Although we all must die, death seems to strike under a general law of death. Thus death in well regulated communities is in one sense so regular that it is possible to ascertain with

reasonable accuracy how many of a multitude of persons of a particular age, will die within next year, how many in the second year, how many in the third and so on. Thus death, rampant amongst infants, declines in power when faced by boyhood and girlhood, re-asserts its power steadily through mature manhood and when the border line of fifty-five is passed, then the old malignity that decimated infant life revives again ; and the rider on the pale horse rides on in triumph. Thus there seems to be a law of dying for the multitude, as well as a law of living for the multitude.

But, mark you, there may be the outlining of the great law, the assertion of a great general principle ; yet when we endeavour to reduce the principle to individuals, then there looms up the truth of the divine assertion that ' of that day and that hour knoweth no man." Why men are living to-day, strong, healthy and vigorous, that were given up by almost a faculty, while others have died, that have been promised life, and others with signs of rudest health written all over them, have passed away; at the bright fire side

with the family all about them, or lying down to sleep at night, have slept on, until the morning that knows no ordinary waking, — and this may be your lot or mine—God alone knows. Averages and laws of mortality are all useful in their way, but for the individual there is no resting place on them for sole of foot. Of my hour, and of yours knoweth no man.

Now midst this awful uncertainty in which we live and move, have we no message of comfort or promise of blessing? The world has no message. It practically says, "I can do nothing for you in the premises. When death comes I will follow you; I will send my wreath to rest on your coffin's lid; I will observe the proprieties."

Science and earthly skill of grandest profession can do nothing for you. "We try "to prevent the presence of death," it says, "but once it enters we cannot eject it; when "it appears our work is done."

Then wealth and position and earthly influence have no message. All you ever were, all you ever made, withers for you, as

if struck by lightning, when you give or feel the last sad words, "It is finished."

Even earthly love has no message for you beyond the assurances that may ring about your fast deafening ears "that you will live in the memory of the survivors—survivors! how long are they going to survive? O God help us! Is there no message? Yes, the message of Christ. At that very moment when all seems lost, and wisdom and wealth, and even earthly love can do nothing to keep us, he speaks, and his words are these: "I have come again to receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also."

Now, my friends, if this, this presence of Christ in death to lighten our darkness, to lead us, with the blindness of death on us, through the Dark Valley—if this be true,—if it be a fact that at such a moment He can comfort us, and make us happy, and prepare us for the new state into which death ushers us,—if all this be true, is it any wonder that the preacher should ring on, whilst preaching power lasts, "Believe in Christ, depend on Christ, love Christ."

For this message of love, mind you, is for the disciple. I do not say that the Divine Saviour may not flash suddenly into the darkness of the sudden death of the godless unbeliever, and that He may not have a message even for him. But here we have the actual message for the disciple: "I have come again to take you unto myself. If death is not sudden, if we know that it is coming, if we are watching for it, we can feed on this promise like food to strengthen us and say, "If death is coming, thank God, He also is coming, to take me to himself." Men and women have died, as disciples who have had the darkness of physical death driven out clear before them by the glory of the heavenly vision. Their prayer became an address to the Saviour whom surely they saw, though we about the bed could see nothing. Like Stephen, they seemed to say, "I see him, I see him," and then, like Stephen, they fell asleep to awake with Christ in Paradise.

But this is the blessing of discipleship; which discipleship is ours—is yours to-day, and mine, — when we trust in Christ for everything, and through evil report and good,

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through darkness and sunshine, push on, and do our duty. Trust him for everything. Have Him behind everything of your life, as the pure white screen on which your poor blurred but well meant actions fall in shadow, and all will be well for time and for eternity.

Well, for time; you will be the better man, the better woman, for having Christ with you in your daily life. And well for eternity, when the deafness of death steals over you, and the new-found hearing of heavenly things bursts on you in the words "I have come again to take you to myself."

ADVENT.

If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.

John vii: 17.

First, I would have you to notice that these words are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself regarding the way in which we may gain a personal knowledge of the teaching of God; get comfort, and strength, and power out of it, for our own religious good, and the growth of our Christian life.

"If any man," says Christ, "willeth to do God's will," makes up his mind to do it, just as he makes up his mind to do anything else, he shall find out practically and personally whether the teaching under which he is acting is of God or of man. If he wishes to know whether the Bible is a revelation from God, and is essentially an inspired book, let

him submit himself, his will, his intelligence, his daily life, habits, mode of doing business, to the Bible; put himself in harmony with God, as God is revealed in the Bible, and in due time he will learn irresistibly that the Bible is an inspired revelation from God.

What I mean by the expression "getting into harmony" with God is this: Take the case of a student beginning what to him is a perfectly new study. He gets about him his books and instruments, and as he looks at the instruments and runs his eyes over the books, seeing words he never saw before, and plates and pictures to him at first sight wholly incomprehensible, he realizes to the full that he has not the faintest idea of the study he is about to strive and master. But starting on this knowledge of his own ignorance, and submitting himself wholly to his teachers, and accepting wholesale their teaching, before long he discovers that he is actually groping out of his ignorance, and that what at first appeared to him an almost hopeless puzzle is fast becoming, not only full of interest, but it is moulding and fashioning to a large extent his daily life, so that his study

absorbs his whole mental force and power, and that, pleasurably, for he is now in full mental harmony with the various branches of its teaching.

Indeed this law of harmonious relations obtains almost everywhere. One can of course fancy a dead dull-minded man, passing through life without the faintest idea that there was anything wonderful or striking in the various works of nature that surrounded him. But submit yourself to nature, become her willing pupil, give eye and ear and mind to her service and direction, and before long you will get in harmony with nature, and she will disclose to you secret after secret. each one more beautiful and captivating than the other. On the other hand, go forth finding fault with rain and shine, and heat and cold, with rush of river and dryness of brook, and nature will remain as dumb and blind and deaf to you, as you are blind and deaf and dumb to nature. In short, to know any teaching we must submit to the teacher; and the more perfect the submission the more perfect the learning.

Now it is just the same with man and God.

To get to know God, to get at his teaching, the first thing we must do is to place ourselves in harmony with God, and this we can only do by striving and battling or fighting to become pure, or clean, or holy, to drag ourselves out of the evil into which He can never go, and to come into his presence washed and cleansed in some way acceptable to Him. For uncleanliness and cleanliness can never harmonize. However God may pity and even love him who is unclean, he can never love his uncleanliness; for,as St. Augustin wrote, "He loved us filthy that he might make us fair." The cleanliness creates the harmony, our cleanliness harmonizing in some way with God's purity.

Hence the folly of the drunkard saying, "I will go on drinking till God stops me;" or the unbeliever, "I will go on in my unbelief;" or the troubled person, "I will go on with my tears." Do you suppose that God will force his revelation on you whilst you are fighting against him? Is God going to rob you of your manhood, your free will, that which ennobles and distinguishes you from the creatures beneath you? Is God going to

paralyse or ignore that will, and drive you into Heaven as a shepherd's dog drives sheep into a fold? Nay; God has respect to our free, moral agency, to our power of choice. He respects in us what He himself has given us, and He will seldom drive us into harmonious relations with Himself, if the effort after harmony be wholly absent from us. We must first do His will, and then we shall gain a practical knowledge of His teaching.

It is God's will that we should "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," because "his blood cleanses us from all sin," because "we are made nigh to God, by the blood of Christ," because "the blood of Christ redeems us." It is God's will that we should know this, and feel it, and trust in it. Well, if we desire to know and feel the value of this teaching, we must will to obey his will here, and believe in Christ, and trust in Christ. We are not to go on waiting and sinning, and sinning and waiting until God, in some wonderful way, wakes us up to the value of Christ; but at once, without reserve or doubt or fear, we are to bring our sins to God and say: "Lord, here are my sins, wipe out their remembrance

through the blood of Christ, and help me that I may never sin them more." That is what at once brings us into harmony with God, for the whole plan of his salvation is meant to bring us to these very thoughts and very words.

But you ask, how can I know Christ until I understand his teaching? I cannot say. I only know that your plan is not the divine plan. The divine recipe is — to obey, to give up your mind, and will, and hope, and trust, wholly and unreservedly to Christ. There must be no doubt or scepticism or reservation, but wholesale obedience to the command, "Believe in Christ and trust Him," and if there is this honest obedience, then the whole doctrine of the value and power of the blood of Christ will in time become a living reality to you, a vital necessity of your faith. Not, first the doctrine appreciated, digested and assimilated — and, then, the resignation of your will and the effort of faith; but first, the resignation of your will and your obedience and faith, and then the doctrine, clear, distinct, beautiful to mind and soul, alive and sparkling with comfort and joy, and

with great depths of strength and power to bathe in and come out of fresh and strong for the fight of faith, and the daily measure of happy victory.

Again it is God's will that we should study the Scriptures as a guide. But how can I accept Scripture as a guide until I have proved its power to guide? Surely first I must prove, then I must accept. Well, that seems rational, but we do not apply the rule to other guides. The schoolboy does not examine his schoolmaster as to whether he is fit to teach, nor does the medical or legal student receive the instruction of his professors tentatively and subject to his own revision. Nay, in all instruction of school, college, or profession, faith in the teacher and acceptance of his views lie at the very root of successful examination.

And so it is here. Christ does not say, first prove the Scriptures and then accept them, but, first accept them, and the fruit of the acceptance will give the needed proof, both to mind and spirit. Here again the divine recipe is obedience,— tacit, willing obedience. Read, study, and, above all, commence to put

in practice the Word of God, make it the rule of your life, the guide of your actions. Begin: do not wait till you are sure of the worth of every command. Show your faith, obey, read honestly, candidly, thoroughly, throwing the mind open to the reception of all divine truth, and if you do this, the Book will prove to be the Voice of God. In time you will be able to say out of your own personal and spiritual experience: "This is the Voice of God," for you have willed to do God's will, and as a natural and consistent consequence you have learnt that the teaching is of God.

And so with prayer. "If any one lack wisdom let him ask of God." "What," you say, "before I know that prayer is a reality, that it can influence God's decisions and tell on his providences?" Yes; obey, do what you are told and leave results with God. Pray, and prayer will prove itself. No amount of argument or study can advance you one whit in reducing a divine power like prayer to the level of your comprehension. Obey, and then the worth and power and value of prayer will grow on you through personal experience.

Again, it is God's will that through our reception of the Holy Communion we should show forth our Lord's death till his second Advent, — that we should "show forth his death till He come." But you say, surely I should not commune until I am good enough, or until I understand the mystery as to how partaking of bread and wine can help me in my Christian course. Nay; for Christ said to the representatives of every possible phase of Christian life, to whom he first administered it: "Take ye all of this, — all take it, weak, erring, faulty though ye be." In this, as in everything else, you must submit your will to His. You must obey, and in time your own experience will teach you how wise, and good, and loving He was when he told you to obey. Time will teach you that not in the unveiling of the Mystery was the blessing hidden for you, but in the calm, quiet, consistent act of willing and faithful obedience.

Take then as a great Advent lesson, unswerving, unchanging obedience to God; the resignation of will and mind and powers to His will; the giving up of much, that we

may gain more. And think not that in doing this we stand alone. Nay, Christ did it.

"Lo I come to do Thy will, O God. I delight to do Thy will; yea, Thy law is within my heart."

BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.

St. Matt., xxvi: 29.

What can these words mean? Our Lord was founding the great sacramental feast of his love; He had given the bread and wine to his disciples—the bread figuring his body, the wine his blood; He had told them to eat the bread and drink the wine, "in remembrance of Him;" and then He utters the words of the text, "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine. You will drink it, but I will not, until that day when I with you will drink it new in my Father's kingdom." "The fruit of the vine" was the wine on the table used now sacramentally for the first time, and our Lord whilst leav-

ing it to be used by his Church on earth, without his bodily presence at the table, points to a time yet to come when in "the kingdom of God, in the kingdom of his Father," in Heaven, he would sit, as then he sat; and in some sense yet to be made known and appreciated that sacramental feast would be repeated. "I will drink it 'new' with you," he says, "new" in the sense that the general resurrection was to "make all things 'new.'" He that sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." A new body for those raised, but a body; a new heaven, but a heaven; a new earth, and new wine, a new feast, but a feast, that in some sense would perpetuate the great remembering thought of how the world was saved through Jesus Christ. He places the eternal stamp on this great Sacrament; it was to survive the crash, and wreck and desolation of judgment, and the doom of the world; it was to be swept by the last wave ebbing from the shores of time, and carried high up on the shores of eternity; it was never to cease. In some sense, throughout the eternal ages, life and immortality would rest on the divine words,

"Take eat, this is my body; drink, this is my blood."

I have always thought that this fact casts a peculiar halo of sacred power about the feast of the Lord's Supper. To me all controversies about it, turning on definitions and words, are as the veriest jangling of the most horrible discordancies. For us, what is needed is faith, not argument; I am told to eat and drink, to do so in remembrance of Christ who died to save my soul—let me do it. And whatever Christ wills to do for me through that feast, let Him do it; for the gift, the grace, the blessing, is not born of my act; but flows forth from Him, as his blessing on my act of simple faith. And if, at times, my faith is staggered at the simplicity of the act, at the simplicity of the institution which calls forth the act, let me look: first, at God himself instituting it, then at its undying life from Christ till now, then at its lasting vitality from now, onward to the great white throne, and then from the great white throne into eternity itself; and as that vision of divinely perpetuated life passes before me—hushed be every controversy, crushed out be

every doubt, whilst my prayer goes up to God as I hold out my hands to partake,— "Lord, increase my faith."

Now, who is called to partake of this undying feast?

Let me fancy this Church, as it is filled now, let me fancy it the upper room in which the feast was instituted. We, we are in the upper room, and Christ is seated at his table. All the feelings that are now in your hearts, all the lives that you are now living are in that upper room; for we fancy ourselves there, as this moment we are here, and Christ knows every feeling and knows every life. The wine is on the table, the bread is on the table, and He who dies for us, blesses and breaks; and as he does so, in our sight, we feel that strange, mystic thrill of isolating personality which drives, straight from heart to lip, the almost sobbing question, "O my God, will he ask me? Will he ask me?" For not one soul present can feel that it is worthy to kneel there; not one soul dare rise and say "Lord here am I, call me." Oh! whom will he call? How many shall he call? Shall I be left, shall you, and you be left, to see others

blessed whilst you are banned? Will He write "elect" on the child's head and pass the father, or call the father and leave the child alone? Oh! whom will He call? How many will He call?

Watch! He has blessed, and he has broken, and now rising and looking as it were into every face and speaking as it were to every soul, He holds out his arms as if to draw us magnetically to his heart of love and says, "Take ye all of it; all take it. Eat, this is my body; drink, this is my blood." There is not an eye that is not met by His; there is not a soul to whom the invitation is not given, because God invites to the feast, and Christ has died for every soul, for every soul the cross was borne, for every soul the blood was shed, and to every soul Christ says, "Take eat, this is my body; drink, this is my blood."

But is it possible, you ask, that Christ could invite me? Why not? Why, man or woman, He died that he might save you; ought not that to be enough? But, says one, "O sir, I have a secret sin that wears me to my soul." Thank God that it wears you to your soul! May it keep on wearing you until your sin

itself is emaciated and worn. Come, because it wears you to your soul! Who can tell that this very act of penitent faith may not kindle a fire of holy and forcible resistance in your breast that may lead you to fight your sin to the death, and make you more than conqueror. Judas had a secret sin that did not wear him to his soul, and Christ knew it did not wear him, and yet Christ invited Judas.

But, says another, "O sir, I am full of doubts, I hardly know what I believe." Ah! that was the way with Thomas, and Christ knew that it was the way with Thomas, and yet Christ called him to the feast. The surest recipe for doubt is obedience, loving, grateful obedience; obedience springing from the thought, "He knows me and yet he calls me." All that we need is the wish to obey, the desire to be better, the hope and the prayer to be better. If the wish is there and the desire there, His call is there, for this feast is no religious form, it is a life-sustaining and magnificent spiritual reality.

O my friends, what I long that you should feel is the reality of the gift. The cross of

Christ was raised on high for all, and this feast is the visible outcome of the cross, as if Christ said: "The cross must crumble into dust, but the power of the cross will live on in countless ways, and chief among them in this way." For, as St. Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless is it not a communion of the blood of Christ," — a communion to me, a communion to you; "the bread which we break is it not a communion of the body of Christ,"—a communion to you, a communion to me? It is a real blessing, a help, a divine strength, meant by Christ for poor, weak erring souls,— like Peter who denied Christ, like Thomas who doubted him, like all the apostles who forsook him and fled. The strong may partake and be the better for the partaking; but your weakness, your sin-struggles, your desire to be better, give force and power to the call, so that the voice of Christ seems to sound specially for you: "You, who are weakest, come, for this my blood was shed for you, this my body was broken for you." You are the traveller bruised by sin and bleeding, and Christ through cross and feast is the good Samaritan who pours in the oil and wine,—

the deeper your bruising the deeper his pity.

Now, Christmas has once more come round to us, and though this feast is ever open to you all, yet for all who value Christ as Christ should be valued, surely Christmas without kneeling there would scarce seem Christmas to us at all. As the angels bring to each of us, young and old, the message, "Unto you is born this day a Saviour," oh! how natural ought it to be for us to kneel there, with the sacred anthem from on high ringing in our ears. Not that the feast has more power on Christmas day than on any other day, but that the call thither sounds louder, sweeter, as the Saviour is born, as the old year is dying, as the scattered family gathers, as memory wakes us up to thoughts forgotten, as all that is good in us, seems to receive a fresh impulse, as the spirit of Christmas enters into our hearts, and homes and feelings. As all these things combine to cast a sacred halo about the day, the voice of Jesus seems to speak with special purpose to every soul and say, "Do this in remembrance of me."

May God through his Holy Spirit bring you in crowds to His holy table on next

Christmas day. Fathers, and mothers, and children, whole families, young and old, rich and poor, strong in the faith and weak in the faith; saints willing to confess themselves sinners, and sinners wishing that in some sense they might grow to be God's saints, oh, may God lead you all to think over it, pray over it! Remember if you keep back it is you that keep back, not Christ that warns you back, for He calls all, calls you; you who hardly dare to come, you he calls especially for He knows you need him most. From pew to pew, from heart to heart, He goes to-day and says, "Come, all things are ready for you." Come to the feast which, partaken of here, will in some sense be, to me and you, a binding link of holy love throughout eternity.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

St. Luke ii: 9.

Outside of the world of nature all our consciousness predicates something as existing, and the consciousness of man for all time has, as far as we know, done the same. Given a universe filled with heavenly bodies of glowing splendour for man to gaze on and speculate about, all such gazing and speculation have resulted in imaging a state of life outside our own that we call "the supernatural," because it seems to be above our natural life; like it in some ways, though distinct from it in many, and possessed of the power of entering into our lives, or touching them, not only by guiding influences, whether for good or evil, but by appearances, voices,

visions, and so on. Thus man has worked out for himself two distinct worlds—the visible and the invisible, the latter as real as the former, if only our eyes were gifted with that piercing power which could look through whatever it is that divides one world from the other.

And this reasoning of man, corrected and guided into proper channels, is in every way endorsed by the Word of God, as in accordance with the truth of things as they really exist. Out in this world invisible to us is God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost,—is the paradise of blessed souls, is the waiting-place of all departed spirits, is the home of angel and archangel, is the fortress of all the evil that besets, and the greater stronghold of all the good that sweetens our lives and makes eternal happiness possible. How marvellous to think of it! How the brightest and most beautiful object that earth could fill our sense of sight with would pale and grow dim, if only our eyes could be opened for a moment to the glory and splendour that, as Scripture teaches us, is all about us and around us, as truly as the sunlight itself

when, piercing the clouds, it reigns as king. The great eternal things, and the first of all created things, and the splendour of all divine things — Oh! if for one moment we could see them, what a sense of God we should have! how real countless things would become that now are swathed in mystery!

Now, one of the charms of Christmas is, that for a moment it draws aside the veil, pulls back the curtain, and we catch glimpses of things that at other times are to us invisible. Everything about Christmas comes from beyond; the springs of it burst forth in the invisible world; mother and earthly father each are touched with its mysterious power; even the rough shepherds seem to glow in a light that shines from above, and the mystic star that guides the travellers from the distant East gleams and glistens with a light divine. As one reads the whole story in quietness, the conviction seems forced in on one that, after all, the most real world of power, majesty, beauty, glory, is not that which is visible, but that which lies out beyond, and of

which Christmas gives us a passing glimpse.

These Christmas angels, how beautiful they are, as Heaven seems to open and they pour forth on rushing wing and fill the midnight sky with human-like forms, bright and beautiful, whilst the whole air thrills and reverberates with the sound of human words uttered by thousands of angelic lips, and borne aloft on harmonies of voice that rise and swell and fade away in the beauties of celestial music. Oh! what a world that must be, where such as these are the common messengers of God to do his bidding!

Then linked with Christmas, though strictly not a part of it, how magnificent is Gabriel, standing at the right side of the altar of incense, a form of unearthly splendour and beauty, yet using human language as he says, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God!" Apart from all doubt, well might the eyes of Zacharias have been blinded as he looked on him whose place was in the very centre of all the glories that are divine.

Then the infant Child itself—true child, yet heralded as never was child before:

"Thou shalt call his name Emmanuel—God with us," and "Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins," and "the Son of the Highest," and "the Son of God." That wondrous Child, whose own mother called it "God, my Saviour," and whom the aged Simeon, as he looked on it, called "My Salvation." Wonderful are the hosts of angels that fill the heavens with their glory; wonderful, Gabriel the messenger of the Highest; but mere motes in sunbeams these, as compared with the wonder of all wonders, the mystery of all mysteries, a feeble child, and that child "God with us." "They shall call his name Emmanuel—God with us."

As the shepherds look they see more than an infant. Out from the glory of the Heaven that shone all about them they still hear the single voice of the angel teacher, "Seek out the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger; for that child is born for you to-day—your Saviour, Christ the Lord."

As Mary looks upon her child she sees more than an infant. "If angels' word be true, (and who dare doubt it?), "that Holy thing born of me is the Son of God."

As wise men from the distant East look, they see more than an infant, they see a God, for they fall down and worship Him.

How wonderful, and yet how real! There is reality in the cool, clear midnight air, the solemn silence of night, the brilliant stars, the sleeping sheep, the watching shepherds, the earthly city close at hand hushed and silent. But not less real are the gates of Heaven flung open wide, whilst hosts of angels, whose brilliancy dims the stars themselves, sweep down on earth like marshalled armies, filling the midnight air with the melody of Heaven and the words of earth combined. Each angel is as real as each shepherd; He who in solitary grandeur spoke the words that awoke the heavenly anthem as real as that shepherd who first said, "Let us go into Bethlehem," and the outburst of heavenly music as real as that with which in centuries long after man sought to lift up the words. It is all real—angels and shepherds, mother and sleeping child—the two worlds, visible and invisible, meeting together on that Christmas morning and blending into one.

And so to-day Christmas calls us through Jesus Christ, who lived and died to save our souls, to look out beyond Bethlehem, beyond the calm of earthly resting, beyond the stars themselves, to that real world of teeming life, where God is, and whence Christ Jesus came. To one He said when death drew near, "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Paradise—let the Christmas Child teach us to lift up our eyes there. To others He will say when all things earthly are ended, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;" let the Christmas Child teach us to lift up our eyes there. To others He has promised, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I shall be his God and he shall be my son;" let the Christmas Child lead us to lift up our eyes to that inheritance, for these are the real yet invisible things which lie out beyond us — the "blessed country," the "Heavenly Jerusalem," the "city of God." As real yet for us, if only we are faithful, as the stairway of our life fast wearing beneath our feet, or the bright ringing laughter of many a child this morning, as it stands on the lower steps of the same stairway, weighed

down with Christmas gifts. The visible and the invisible, this country stretching on and on and on, till it meets "the blessed country," out of which the angels came to break the silence of Christmas morning.

CHRISTMAS.

She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger.

St. Luke ii: 7.

It is a hard thing, and I doubt if it would be a wise thing, to strive and vary what a teacher should say to his people on Christmas Day. For the charm of Christmas is not the novelty that you may introduce into its observance; rather is it found in the care you display in presenting the old, time-worn thoughts that have clustered round the season since first it touched the hearts of men. We have the manger gnawed by teeth of fretful beasts, licked by tongues of wearied cattle, a covering or shelter for panting, quivering, over-driven sheep resting beneath. Then we have the long file over yellow desert of priest, philosopher, wise men, following the

mystic star that leads them to the new-born infant. And then we have the shepherds, human watch-dogs over marketable sheep, listeners to the divine music, beholders of the heavenly angels that fill the midnight air with their celestial forms and tell a sleeping world that Christ is born. And then we have the Child itself—new-born always—with the rosy blush of dawn ever about it. Why, one can fancy the young face looking at our children's children as they grow old, and their children's children, and on to the very end of time—a new-born infant still, with the old Christmas message ringing like sweetest bells all about it, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men."

Now, if in this way the Christmas infant never grows old, if infant ever, "It lies like waking sunlight on the stream of time," then your Christmas doctrine, and your Christmas sermon, and your Christmas thoughts can never grow old. You may re-set the thoughts, as jeweller the costly gem, but the setting is nothing, save to the vulgar mind that prizes glitter, the gem is the same, always the same—unchanged.

An infant lying in a manger. It tells us of weakness, poverty, helplessness, of tiny hands and arms stretched out aimlessly, of something to be nursed and sheltered from danger and cold, something to be fed, or it will starve—dependent. Not a babe in costly cot hemmed in with down, in room heated with care of wisest skill, but a babe in a rude, rough manger, the hot breath of cattle going up like smoke in the clear, cold air, that enters in through every chink and gaping crack of the rough, rude building. If born but a few hours earlier it might have been a babe by roadside, or babe in ditch.

Well, Christmas has seized the thought and from it, spider-like, has spun its sermon, with threads running from heart to heart, which join whole Christian congregations into one mesh or web of love. Remember the poor, who are like the infant Christ. Out of the fulness of your store give to them, out of your vocabulary select kind words; think the best of them, review them in the light of your own blessings.

And for this reason, and surely for none other, was the Lord of all born as He was;

not as a slight on what was higher and loftier and wealthier, but to bring the high and lofty into the stable and round about the manger, that they might learn lessons seldom dreamed of in their sleeping. Lessons as to how thousands and tens of thousands are in a ceaseless state of moving, shifting and flying, knowing not where to sleep, or where a journey begins or ends. How women, as the sorest hour of their womanly life draws near, drag out their weary journey till the old sorrow of womanhood meets them. How tiny infants just like the Christ are born anywhere, anyhow, in cold and poverty and cruel biting want; how sometimes the very cattle in the stalls seem like luxurious lords compared with the new-born child, born into the world with a sad, wan face, pinched already—the poverty of the parents visited on the children.

No, it was not to censure the wealthy that Christ was born poor, but that He might soften their hearts and melt them into tenderness, as they think, not of their own children nestling in comfort, but of the new-born picture of the child Christ, born in a garret and wrapped in a worn blanket.

And so the Christmas message comes to you to-day. "I come to soften your heart," it says, "and loose your purse, and lead you to think of those iron hours of biting penury, when the whip of poverty flies fast and sears the backs of poor men and poor women and poor children—children just like the child Christ. Be merciful," it says, "be generous, give and it shall be given by God to you; remember the poor, and remember them to-day." So preaches Christmas, and so it would ever preach of its own inherent force if every preacher were struck dumb.

Not only an infant lying in a manger, but a father and mother looking at it. What were their thoughts? We know that the mother had thoughts beyond all mothers—thoughts sown in her heart by angel visits and angel songs, thoughts born of a magnificent faith reaching out into darkness and contending with it bravely. But the father's faith seems to have been of a lower kind. I doubt if it rose beyond a destiny for his child like that of Gideon, of whom an angel spake before the child was born.

But the noblest stretch of the mother's

faith could scarcely have reached to that which if she were living now—revived, brought back—she would see or hear. Dare she believe as she looks on her child that the time would come when the eyes of millions would be turned towards that same manger, as on to-day, and that in almost every language, here spoken boldly, there timidly, elsewhere in whispers, the same words would be uttered by countless lips, "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us." Or as the wondering shepherds flocked into the stable, repeating the wondrous song brought down from Heaven to earth, did Mary realize that the time would come when that Advent song would ring throughout a world, not in Judea alone, but in giant cities, in quiet villages, in busy marts of commerce, by camp fires in prairie and in forest, on shipboard in far distant seas, by the poor in their poverty, and the rich in their wealth, and the sick in their sorrow, and the strong in their joy, and by children voices everywhere, all uniting in the one heaven-born song, caught up from angels to be sung by men till time shall be

no more, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." Or, as she fondled her child, as mothers will, now stroking its velvet flesh, now lifting it out before her as if in jest, and now madly kissing it on mouth and eyes and hands and feet—that wild idolatry of motherhood, smiled on, no doubt, by God—did she believe the time would come when death itself would stand dumb before her Child, made happy by its brightness? Could she see young life, young children, fading out like spring flowers touched by frost, telling those about them that "Jesus was waiting to take them home, that they saw Him, that He stood near them?" Could she see old life, aged men and women, strong to the last through faith, facing the dark valley without fear? "For thou art with me," they say, "thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Or, outside of death, though often near it, penitent prodigals, women lost to the world, though not to God, hardened rebels, hardened for years, yet softened at the last, kneeling at the foot of the cross and sobbing out their grief in penitential litany? "O lamb of Gob, that takest away the sin of the world, take away my sin."

Now, one wonders could Mary see all this through faith? I doubt it, but we can see and feel it all on this blessed Christmas morning, when we kneel at the feet of the Christmas Child and feel that we kneel at the feet of our God.

Mary might well have asked, "How can this infant ever do the wonders of the Christ? How can it live as God and man, and die as man, and rise as man, and enter Heaven as God to plead for us and hold his cross before the throne, and come again as God to judge the world and bring in everlasting righteousness, and gather his own together and save the lost? How can these things be?" And yet they were and are and will be.

The greatest fact that stands out on the history of close on nineteen hundred years is this same infant, Jesus Christ. As one has said, "He has communed with all the centuries since his advent, and has penetrated them with a purer, loftier and more God-like spirit. All that is of highest good in the world is his, for He has made the upper purity and lower sin to meet together at the foot of the cross, and given to man not only

an ideal of righteousness, but righteousness itself."

Nay, the only peaceful hope of happiness after death is His, something won for us by Him, our peace purchased by his death, our peace his gift, a gift that in those long centuries millions have held out their hands for, as faint and weary, with the death chill stealing over them, they closed their earthly speech with the glowing words, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."

Yes, one wonders how far the thoughts of the mother went as she gazed on her child. Yet, could she have seen what we see, there should have been no limit to her vision. All that is of the best in the world to-day looks on the infant Christ, and looks to adore. In the infant we see our God, the manger to us becomes Heaven, it contains God, and Heaven comes near to us in angels' songs of it, and man, poor poverty-stricken man, is there to gaze and look—God and man brought together by the Christmas child.

So may God bless you all this Christmas. May Christ be in your homes and in your hearts. May his name, his grace, his love

give force and power to your lives, and as you leave this church to-day may you feel that the noblest gift that God has given you is Jesus Christ.

CHRISTMAS.

The young child. Matt. ii : 14.

It is a wonderful thought that when the Lord Jesus came into the world He came as an infant, and passed through all stages of human life up to perfect manhood. Apart from his peculiar holiness and beauty of character, I fancy there was nothing at first outwardly that marked him off from the companions of his childhood, youth and manhood, until He began to teach, and supplemented his teaching by miraculous actions, for of course his teaching and miracles constituted him at once a unique and unusual being. Great teachers had taught before, but none taught as He taught, none claimed to speak as God. Great prophets had prayed to God and raised the dead by prayer, but none

had ever stood beside a dead body and said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." The teaching and miracles of Christ burst forth from a spring of power within himself, and hence the public verdict ran, "Never spoke man like this man," or, "See how through his miracles He manifests his own glory." But up to this bursting forth of divine and individual power, the infant slept in its mother's arms as infants sleep; the child acted as a child, the boy as a boy, coupled, however, with certain peculiarities that in the very nature of things gathered about both Child and Mother, and that set them apart outside the common lot.

He was a real infant resting in a real mother's arms (born midst a mother's pains), and yet no mother could ever have looked on child as she looked, for no child had ever come into a mother's arms as this child came. What child had ever such a story of its coming told? What child had ever such a birth-night, or such visitors around its cradle? What birth in Judæ had ever influenced wise men of the East and drawn them towards a lowly infant as foreign embassies are drawn

towards kings? Above all, what meant those wondrous words, spoken of the infant yet to come: "He shall be great, and he shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end," and "That holy thing which shall be called 'the Son of God?'" As strains of music linger in the mind, as dreams seem at times to change into living realities, and move in the foreground of our thoughts, so these wondrous words and scenes that clustered round the infant's birth must have lifted the virgin mother's thoughts into a field that no mother who ever looked on child could think of. She looks on her child, it is her child, and yet the wondrous forecast of its being rings out clear and distinct, "The holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." She is a real mother, her child cries, she flies to it and calms it, and as she does so she may never think it aught but a child that needs a mother's soothing; but as in quiet hours of day she looks on it, or waking up at dawn

sees it sleeping on her outstretched arm, the angel seems again to speak to her : "O woman highly favoured, the Lord is with thee, thy sleeping child is the child of God, for with God nothing is impossible." Now just as a child's life is interlocked with its mother's, and the mother's with that of her child, so from the very first consciousness, at least of boyhood, there must have gone forth from the mother an influence, that entering into the boy's life made it at least peculiar. For what mother was ever placed in such a position?" To look into her child's eyes as standing by her knee it looked upward and called for kisses, and to feel as she kissed,—I kiss my child, I kiss my God.

And as the child advanced in years, fancy the atmosphere of motherly teaching in which the growing child lived. Could Mary have kept these marvels wholly hidden in her heart, and never raised the curtain that her boy might learn somewhat of the wonders of the past? It seems impossible. One can fancy the holy mother with cautious wisdom telling the story of the Christmas angels, of sun-burnt white-haired strangers from the

East, of the wondrous star that did everything but speak, of the aged saint who lived on that he might bless and who died when he had blessed, and how she clasped her Jesus to her breast and fled trembling at every sound lest Herod's sword should reach him. Yes, and she had tales not only for his ear but for his eye. Cannot you fancy her at stated times (just as mothers now show bright things to their children) lifting up the golden earring or the bright-shining bracelet, and telling as she did so the oft-repeated story, always fresh, of how the camels, with noiseless tread on desert sand, bore the givers from the distant east where the great sun rises in brilliant light hedged round with gold-tipped clouds. No doubt there was much she never told or hinted at, things that she pondered over and kept deep in her godly heart. What would it all lead to? Where would it all end? How reconcile the angel's message and the magi's gifts with the awful words, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also?" What was that sword, that awful spectral terror that came between God's angels and her child? These were the

leading thoughts, be sure, that Mary pondered in her heart; but do not tell me that the boy never heard of the angels, or the wondrous birth-night or his marvellous yet unshaped destiny, or that the magi's gifts were hidden from his sight, and that he never heard of them or saw them. Let us rather believe, what human nature would have us believe that the child was given the dim outline of his divine destiny from his mother's lips, and that God filled in the sacred tinting.

Yet He knew it in all its wonders before she did, although He, boy-like, fancied that she knew it all. It was in the temple apparently that the fact of his person and his mission burst on him in all its fulness, and that the son of Mary realized that in the highest sense He was the Son of the living God. Mary lays her motherly hand on the boy, and half rebuking says, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." He turns on her, and in effect says, "What, do you mean to say that you did not know it? Has it been a secret from you as it has been a secret from me?" A great painter has pictured the scene with the genius of a high-born artist.

The boy is listening to his mother, and replying with his lips, but look at his eyes, those marvellous, speaking eyes, full orbed and beautiful, looking beyond his mother, beyond the Jewish court, beyond the distant mountain, out into the illimitable future, whilst mind is striving to grasp at awakening memories of a past existence; startled, dazed, confounded, the Son of Mary, realizing that he is the son of God.

From this time forth we know nothing of Jesus till the cousin from the south points to the cousin from the north and says, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Scripture tells us nothing. It simply takes childhood, consecrates it, honours it, leaves us with the child and boy. No other Jesus for us till we see the man Christ.

No child can ever be as Jesus, for none could ever be born or none could ever live in such environments. But no father or mother, true to God, can look on their child and forget that Jesus was a child, that childhood is God, as well as manhood, that children are not spectral forms that flit through the life of childhood unthought of by their loving Father,

but that God loves them, and that they, faithful often above all others, can in their childish way love God. There is a child Christ and a man Christ; the one melts into the other, and the child Christ may be as dear to children as the man Christ is to manhood. It is the same Christ, as that mother is the same who sings meaningless lullabies by the cradle upstairs, and then goes downstairs to her grown-up children and talks of deeper things in words of wisdom. It is the same Christ.

Let us thank God for this wide-spread love of his. God be praised for the Jesus that thinks of the nursery and school-room as well as of the great world outside, that blesses men, but forgot not to take up "little children in his arms and bless them." God be praised that a child life went before the sterner life of Him who died for men — a child life that surely lives in his memory as He receives the prayer of the little one below, "God bless father and mother, and God bless brother this and brother that for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen," and then up with lap-tossed head, and the laugh and kiss, in no way out of place with the sacred words.

Yes, Christmas comes and Christmas passes away from us like a setting sun, but like sunset it has its rich glowing light and all that glow and light it concentrates on childhood. Let us learn, in the clearness of the vision, to see our duty towards the children of our homes, and by word and caution, and, best of all, by daily example to guide childhood on towards manhood, leaving it to God and Man to guide manhood into glory.

EPIPHANY.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king; behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship Him.

Matt. ii: 1-2.

Who were these wise men? whence came they from the East to Jerusalem? They are called in St. Matthew's Gospel "wise men",— that is, Sages, — and this title, coupled with their home — east of Jerusalem — is about the only Biblical track we possess worth following in our efforts to gain some knowledge with regard to them. That they were kings, is a very beautiful poetic idea, once no doubt firmly believed, as the great tomb in the cathedral of Cologne testifies; but there is no more proof to favour such

an idea than there is proof that they were sailors or soldiers.

Bear in mind that they were called "wise men;" then travel from Jerusalem eastward and seek for a country where such a title was officially recognized, and in due time you strike on Persia, where in ancient days anyone would have told you that the Magi or "wise men" were a religious caste — astrologers, diviners, astronomers, prophets,— men of science as well as religion.

Nebuchadnezzar conquers the Medes, the sister race of the Persians, but he does not destroy the great religious caste of the Magi included amongst his captives. It not only holds its own as part of a conquered nation, but it influences the people of Babylonia; it influences the great King, it becomes a power in the royal court, and at one time the Jewish-born prophet Daniel is made head of the caste — master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers, because wiser than they all. Thus, long before God's angels, bright and beautiful, made midnight vocal with Christmas melody, or the infant Child lay calmly sleeping in its mother's

arms; or the mystic star led company of wise men across the desert,— long before all these wondrous scenes which, clustering round the Christmas thought, have made it beautiful,— the Magi of old had come in contact with the great Jewish race,— nay more, had acknowledged as its head and leader in a foreign court,—that great Jewish prophet whose life, it is supposed, covered the whole period of the captivity, and whose power of prophetic vision reached on to "the restitution of all things," to the vision of "the Ancient of Days," and the "Son of Man standing before the throne."

We read the Book of Daniel, — a book that stands alone in magnificent picturings that figure forth the future not of one nation but of the world,— we read the book; but fancy what it must have been to have lived with the man who wrote it, to have sat at his feet as an humble servant and scholar; to have treasured his teaching words as one of a sacred caste bound to treasure and transmit the teaching of Him whose words taught, and whose will ruled the caste itself. If you wish to guage the power of this kind of traditional teaching,

to judge the effects of oral transmission, go to the East, where wise sayings and solemn thoughts are passed on from generation to generation, from age to age — like costliest jewels —, where transmitted words and thoughts seem to look down on our boasted printing with a scorn that arises from an innate sense of the power of sacred and irresistible oral perpetuation. Shall Daniel then have his wondrous visions of Christ and his stored-up knowledge won from Jacob and Moses and Balaam and David and Isaiah, knowledge of the "star that should come out Jacob," of "the rod out of the stem of Jesse," of "the Virgin that shall conceive and bear a Son," of "the King that shall reign in righteousness," of Him who "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities," — and shall not the Master of the caste teach these things of God to the members of the caste? And shall the caste know these sacred things, these visions of God, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and all be forgotten in the days of Herod the king? Nay, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus and Darius and Xerxes, and a long line of Persian kings pass out into

darkness; but the sacred caste remains, lives on with its accumulated treasures of science, literature and religion, until one day its chosen representatives stand in the presence of the crafty and cruel Herod and ask in perfect innocence and faith: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship Him."

As these men cross the desert led by the mystic star, the long procession, journeying slowly on to Christ, seems to me full of teaching that cannot be confined to the country they came from or the country they were making towards. These men are unconscious representatives and types of teeming millions whom we call "heathen," of those swarming multitudes in ages past, and now, whose religious faith, all warped and twisted, nevertheless contains within it lingering remnants of purest teaching; for, surely it may be said that there is no mud and mire of degraded thought in which some lost jewel lies not hid; no portion of the broken mirror which does not reflect the face of God.

Modern investigation has discovered what

the religious views of these distant travellers to the cradle of our Lord were, and one cannot read them without feeling that apart from the teaching of Daniel, these Magi must have held a stronger religious grip of the original revelation given by God to early man than other religious teachers. For, though there might be many inferior divine beings recognized by these Magi,—yet, above all, and Ruler of all, — thoughtful of man's interests, and loving what He thought of, was the One Great God, the principle of spotless good, who fought the Evil One for good of man and helped mankind in its daily conflict between good and evil. The history of the world of these Magi was the history of this conflict, which conflict would last until a Child should be born, destined by God to conquer evil and crush out hell, and wake the dead in universal resurrection and bring in everlasting happiness for a sin-seared world. This was the religion that crossed the desert with the Magi, that lived within the hearts of those that brought their gifts to Christ, and who can read it without feeling that here as elsewhere, God had not left himself

without a witness? Voice of Daniel no doubt is here, but voice of primitive and original tradition must also be here, — here as light in darkness — and a clearer light than the most hopeful could look for.

And, in truth, much the same may be fairly said of all forms of heathen faith—no matter how degraded. There seems none wholly bad, none without some lingering remnant or intuition of that which in Christian lands is regarded as true. It is the fashion of the day with some to ignore the idea of divine revelation and to regard religion as a state of moral and spiritual feeling which has reached Christianity under the laws of mental evolution, and which, in time, will leave Christianity behind as the development of thought evolves still higher conceptions. But such an idea seems strangely contradicted when in degraded tribes, where the evolution of mind and morality seems at a perfect standstill, we nevertheless find religious conceptions that we ourselves reverence as amongst our holiest and most sacred. Where did such thoughts come from? How, midst the wreck and ruin of thought in which we find them,

did they retain an independent grasp of their own, unless originally man as man knew what was good and pure and beautiful, unless these glimpses of truth are relics — abiding relics—of a once pure creed held by man in the earliest hours of his new-born life, and never lost through all the horrors of the most degraded decline in moral and religious speculation?

And this thought is surely borne out by Scripture. In no sense does Genesis attempt to describe all that God taught early man. It simply asserts direct intercourse and communion between God and man, and leaves the extent of divine teaching wholly undescribed. There is no account given of a revelation touching sacrifice; the rite, or sacrament simply appears — surely divinely authorized. We might think that Abraham was a pure monotheist, knowing nothing of Christ, save for our Saviour's own words: "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day,— he saw it and was glad." Be assured of it, as investigation into the religious teaching of ancient countries and existing heathen nations proceeds, this fact will become more

apparent to all unprejudiced minds, that heathenism — ancient and modern — is a fall from light to darkness, and that the lingering light is the remnant of the once pure revelation which, bright and beautiful, and direct from God, made Christ the Saviour to whom the earliest men looked forward.

As one follows these Magi seeking Christ, one feels a thrill of hope in the thought that so, in the days yet to dawn, the heathen may seek the light; that the great regeneration will come, not only from Christ seeking the lost sheep, but the lost sheep themselves bleating for the Shepherd. And one surely learns that, as the Church advances, preaching Christ in heathen wilds, its truest wisdom is to seek in error whatever may be good, and use that as the stepping-stone to destroy evil— use it as St. Paul used it, when standing before the altar raised "to the unknown God," he reviled not the inscription, but used it as a sacred text and "preached Christ" from the sad, the gloomy, the melancholy words.

The procession of these wise men crossing the desert may thus be regarded as a picture of the heathen world hastening to the Christ.

The great prophet saw the vision and pictured it. He saw the earth swathed in heathen darkness and the people covered with gross darkness. Then the glory of the Christ shines into the darkness, as in earliest days, the dull deep waters moved and sparkled in the new born light, and then the heathen come to the light. They gather themselves together, they come to Christ, they come from afar — of themselves they come. Come in thousands and millions seeking the Christ. O Church of God, at times so dead and dull to the glorious mission God hath given thee, so prone to hide thy talent in a napkin, so slow to go, lift up thy sleepy eyes, and see, the heathen will come to thee, if thou dost not go to them! They will storm thy walls if thou dost not storm theirs. O awful irony, unmeant as such, but real in its sting! Heathendom storming Christianity with the cry upon its lips, "Awake, awake; put on thy strength: O Zion, shake thyself from the dust; O captive daughter of Zion: Awake, awake, awake, for we are here."

AFTER EPIPHANY.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.

Romans xii : 19.

This is really a terrible verse, if you regard it as teaching that God will take the work of personal vengeance out of your hands or mine and carry it on himself. As if God said, "You go on and act as a Christian towards your enemy—feed him when hungry, give him drink when thirsty, repay his cruelty with kindness, remembering all the time that I hold the rods of punishment in my hands, and that I will repay. Leave it to me and you will not be unavenged." Whatever the verse means it could not have embodied such a terrible thought as this, and yet not a few read it in this spirit. What, then, does it mean ?

Vengeance means personal retaliation for wrong done, and there are two methods of obtaining vengeance. There is the savage method, with its civilized imitations and the vengeance of Law and Order. On an Indian reserve in this country two Indians, for years fast friends, quarrelled in a wigwam, fought, the result being that one was found dead with his friend's knife in his heart. The brother of the murdered man got on the track of the murderer, dogged his footsteps for weeks, and at last ran him down sitting over a fire he had kindled in the very wigwam where the murder had been committed. The avenger of blood laid his hand on the murderer and said, "You lent my brother a knife, here it is," and stabbed him to the heart. That is the vengeance of savagery. Blood for blood, no questions asked, no enquiry made, no extenuating circumstances sought for, but vengeance carried out to the death, and with the very same weapon that did the deed! In such a case the savage is for the moment the law, the magistrate, the jury, the judge, the executioner, and it may be he is all these

apart from real justice, for in the case quoted he who first shed blood may have done so in self-defence.

And in civilized life, where at times educated people conceive a positive hatred for others—live to thwart, injure, ruin them, and rejoice and gloat over their ruin—dress such avengers as you will, rank them high socially and otherwise, wherever they are, whoever they are, they are simply well dressed, educated savages. If they dared, if they had the courage of the uncivilized savage, they would become law, and judge, and jury, and executioner; their stock of hatred would nerve the arm and sharpen any knife, if only they dared, as the Indian dared.

But there is another method of vengeance—the vengeance of law and order. It seems a fundamental law of nature that crime, however realized as such, must not go unpunished, and this law in civilized life holds the framework of society together. If it did not exist social order could not exist, for brute strength, with its giant powers for evil unrestrained, would scatter desolation everywhere. Your savage Indian says, "I am the law," and he

repays murder with murder. Civilization says, "Crime must be punished, but the vengeance of crime must spring from fair, impartial enquiry, from calm, deliberate investigation, that keeps possible innocence always before it," and hence civilization takes my place as my own avenger by giving us courts of justice, where even the supposed murderer is counted innocent and protected from mob law and injury until he be found guilty, and every possible opportunity is afforded him of substantiating his innocence, if such be possible. In other words, as civilized legal procedure stands over a murdered body, it thrusts back the savage thirst of individual vengeance that may fill my angry heart and practically says the very same words that form my text, "vengeance is mine, it is not yours—vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the law." And the law does repay when, having exhausted enquiry, it deals out justice without fear, favour or affection, it may be through death itself.

Now, when God says, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord," it is this spirit of orderly punishment, not of

deliberate revenge, to which He refers. "I will repay," He says, "not you. If you undertake to deal out personal vengeance the old savage thirst for immediate settlement will rise up in your heart, the old savage blindness that refuses to see any possible palliation or extenuation will darken your eyes, the blood-hound instinct will nerve your deliberate purpose to run down at any cost or labor him, whose wrong done you, burns like a coal of fire in your breast. Leave him to me, as the great sovereign, the calm, impartial judge; leave him to me and I will repay," saith the Lord.

Now, mark you, God does not say how He will repay, but He seems to figure forth his possible course in the method of action that He places before you as the injured party, for whilst He claims that vengeance is to be left to Him, He does not leave you purposeless in the matter. One cannot easily blot out the sense of wrong done as if it never had been done; the wound will leave a scar even though the wound itself be healed. God may take the knife out of our hands, or the blood-hound instinct out of our hearts,

but He does not wipe out the past, nor would it be well for us He should do so, for our dealing with wrongs done us are elements in forming our own Christian life. Nay, God says "Leave him to Me, and then your course as a Christian man is clear and distinct," and then God gives us one of those powerful words of tonic that brace up our nerves to an unexpected and reactionary effort. "Kill your enemy, not with knife, but with kindness; stretch out his hatred for you like a corpse under acts of mercy and love; stand in the path of his misery as a friend and help him. If he be hungry feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing, in so persevering, you will melt his hatreds as coals of fire melt ice, you will drive out the devils that possess him through love, you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Now, this is God's rule of conduct for us—hard, singularly hard, I admit, to be obeyed in consistent practice, but a giant power, where obeyed, to build up Christian character and to develop Christian graces. When I humble myself to really benefit one who has wronged me, to do him good, to return

blessing for cursing, to watch where I can befriend him or his, I am as close to the Lord Jesus Christ in spirit as ever I am likely to be on earth.

But where, then, is my vengeance? you ask. It was never yours, if you are a Christian, it was always God's. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." But how will God pay it out, how will He exercise it? Wisely, you may be sure, and better still, lovingly. Think of it. Is God likely to give you a rule of conduct towards your enemy full of generosity and not without a good influence on yourself, and yet shall God act towards him who was your enemy without generosity and apart from any influence of good upon his erring soul? The thought is shocking. Nay, God takes your vengeance and makes it his, to deal with it as you could never deal with it, he takes it as one who naturally can mingle mercy with judgment, and he takes it from you for the good of your past enemy as well as for the good of yourself. Be assured of it, when vengeance reaches God's hands, when He holds it, it will be for your enemy's good as well as your own. There

is a limit to mercy combined with judgment; there is a limit to the filling of the cup; the hard-hearted, defiant sinner can, and often does, defy God to the last, and then the retribution comes, the retribution that God mercifully has taken out of your hands, and that He has held back in love as long as He could hold it. But if, like David, your enemy sees his sin in the sight of God more even than in yours, and if his cry goes up "Father I have sinned," the stored-up vengeance falls in showers of mercy from God, even as long ago, under God's direction, you have mercifully forgiven.

Yes, God has taken your vengeance; He has made it his own, it tempts you no longer. He does not tell you how long He will hold it, or how He will repay it; He simply says, "It is now mine, it is no longer yours." And we can leave it calmly with Him, feeling sure that if out of vengeance He can bring a victory for good, He will bring it.

AFTER EPIPHANY.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Col. iii : 16.

The question as to the place that music should hold in the services and worship of the Church of God, is one that has come largely before the Christian public within the last thirty years. Let us this morning think over the general question.

Music, of course, is an art, but an art that God originally prepared for by creating instruments or organs to produce it. God made the vocal chords, gave them their vibratory powers, resulting in the register or individual tones of the human voice. Hence it may truly be said that man was formed to sing. And the same may be said of singing

birds, whose vocal organs, differing from man's, produce that liquidity of tone and trill of sound which form the chief beauty of bird life. Birds, as well as man, were made to sing. Now, these human organs of vocalization, joined with human intellect, were left by God to work out their own destiny.

In the eighth generation man had invented musical instruments — stringed and piped,— and these instruments seemed to have been in common use, as the Sacred Volume speaks of "all those who handle the harp and pipe." Apart from Scripture, the oldest evidence of music is so far confined to the Egyptians, whose brilliantly coloured relics in the great Temple of Ammon and the Tomb of the kings, prove clearly that music entered into early religious and social Egyptian life as one of its choicest pleasures. The actual history of music, however, begins much later, — begins with the Greek fable which pictures music as the gift of the Gods, but associates it with the Athenian Hermes, the God of social life and intercourse in general, the God of streets, and doorways, and public games, as if music

were the gift of all whose hearts were happy or, it may be,—sad.

The Bible, however, leads us far behind these Greeks in connection with music as an art. We see Laban complaining that Jacob stole away without "sound of songs or tabret or harp" to speed him on his journey; Job complaining that the timbrel and harp and pipe are in the homes of the wicked; Miriam, wild with victorious excitement, heading a procession of women who play on instruments and move in dances, whilst the weird song of triumph is sung antiphonally or in single voice and chorus. As tumultuous crowds gather round the Golden Calf, as the priestly procession moves round the walls of the doomed Jericho, as the chosen three hundred, led by Gideon, swoop down on the terrified Midianites, as Jephthah's only child comes forth to meet her fate midst timbrels and dances, — music is everywhere.

When we come to David we find music and melody not only consecrated to religion, but breathed on by God himself in the words and use of those deathless productions that re-echo every joy and sorrow the human

heart can feel, — the Psalms of David. The psalms, of course, are poetry, but they are more. The book is termed in Hebrew "the Book of Hymns or Praises," and as they were not only to be sung by voice, but accompanied with musical instruments, they are called in the Septuagint the Psalter, a termed derived from the well-known Jewish instrument, the Psaltery. Music is positively demanded for some of them. The very name of the instrument to be used in rendering the words is sometimes mentioned as in the eighth Psalm; others, we are told, were sung by David; others are called "songs;" others are dedicated to the Sons of Korah—a family or branch of the Levites, whose duties were musical; others are dedicated to the Chief Musician; others are written as songs for Asaph, one of the leaders of David's choir, and others are called "songs of degrees," used, probably, by the people, as three times in the year they went up to Jerusalem to attend the sacred feasts. But throughout the whole of this wondrous book, music is not only honoured, but demanded. "I will sing praise to Thy Name;" "I will sing unto the Lord because He hath

dealt bountifully with me ;" " Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness ;" " Praise the Lord with the harp, sing unto Him with a new song, play skilfully with a loud noise ;" " All the earth shall worship Thee and shall sing to Thy Name ;" " O, Come ; let us sing unto the Lord and make a joyful noise to the God of our Salvation ; " " O sing unto the Lord a new song, sing unto the Lord, bless His name and show forth His Salvation from day to day."

But David did more than write psalms and offer them as praise ; he struck the key-note of all future worhip by declaring praise one of the grandest offerings man could give to God.

The first great choir is David's 288 trained voices and instrumentalists, leaders and teachers of 4000 singers and players, who officiated by courses in the tabernacle service, and, in the days of Solomon, made the Temple services perhaps the stateliest and grandest ever offered to Almighty God. And that such an offering of praise by voice and instrument, was not a merely human hunger after music

and melody but was positively pleasing to God, to whom it was offered, is plain, from the sacred account of the induction of the ark into the most holy place in the temple.

Solomon had brought the silver, and the gold, and the treasures, and laid them in the house of God. The elders of the people, the priests and Levites, in solemn procession, had carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and had left it in the awful silence of the Holy of Holies,— and, yet, God gave no direct and visible sign of divine approval. But when the magnificent choir of the Levites, clothed in white robes, raised their voices as one voice, mingling with sound of cymbals and psalteries and harps, and praised the Lord, saying: "For He is Good and His mercy endureth for ever", — then the house was filled with the cloud and the Lord was present with his people, — so present "that the priests could not minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." It is easy to say: Ah, this was temple worship, this was the childhood of public adoration, all such pomp and pageantry is gone, — that, largely true, is not the

point, — the point is that out of moments, clustering round separate and distinct acts, all of them meant to glorify God's name, He selected that moment when the great building thrilled and reverberated with music and melody and the voice of praise, to reveal Himself to his waiting and expectant people.

From that hour onward, music in worship and adoration has held its place in public acts, held it in spirit if not in sound, even in drearest moments of a nation's misery. When Israel was captive in Assyria, and its good-humoured conquerors sought, at times, to draw out some faint reflection of the sacred music of a ruined temple of which they had heard so much, and said, half coaxingly and half commanding: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion," the mere request was like a dagger to the heart. "Ask us anything but that," they said, "anything but that; how can we sing the Lord's Song in a strange land?"— Why not? Because there is nothing that revives memory with all its sadnesses thick upon its waking life like a strain of well-known music, and no music clings so tenderly to the soul, and gathers round its warmer

memories, as music which is sacred. Any well-known song in a strange land where, even in spirit, we are captive and lonely above all expression, at times is sad, — but the Lord's Song, Ah! that is often the saddest of all.

As for the worship of the Christian Church, music has not alone been characteristic of its whole history, but midst the disruption of the sublime idea which the word "Church" presents to us, music, in its influence and use, has done more to foster unity than any other form of worship we know of; for no strain of real soul music, however born, can ever remain sectarian, or no words of worshipping praise, coupled with music that speaks to the heart, can ever find its real destiny apart from universal life.

"After they had sung an hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives,"—Christ to death and our Salvation,—and never has the Church let slip the thought that in face of death or brightness of life, God shall be praised as Christ praised Him with the shadow of the Cross darkening the very next step of His loving life. Hence Paul and Silas sing praises

in their prison; hence St. James differentiates worship and says: "Is any afflicted, let him pray; Is any merry, let him sing praise." Hence St. Paul tells us "to sing with the spirit and understanding, to teach and admonish one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord." And, surely, there must have been musical unison of some kind in the prayer uttered by the whole company of believers and endorsed by visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit, — "the kings of the earth stand up against us; behold, O Lord, their threatenings, and grant that with all boldness we may speak Thy word."

And so the great power of music as connected with sacred things has swept on its course—conquering always—and will sweep on into eternity itself,—conquering ever. We may know little of the heavenly state that God calls us to through Jesus Christ, but we know that midst the sound of harpers harping with their harps the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, the great host of the redeemed of God, and Christ and Cross and Spirit, with voice

as of many waters and of great thunders, will sing the new song that no living man could learn, and whose echoes will reverberate through eternity itself.

Strange, is it not, how natural it comes to us to sing our prayers! how this habit survives the wreck of the most ruthless reform and holds hard grasp of the most bitter iconoclast! I may reject liturgies, and prayer-books, and antiphonal utterances, and glory in the fact that I have reduced public worship to whispered articulation or even to dumb thought,— but, be I Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, my soul, at times, will burst the bands of my captivity, and, like Levite of Old, or David or Asaph, I will sing my petitions and join in loud united common prayer. For all hymns are not praises, the most beautiful of them are prayers, — direct, positive, pleading prayers uttered to Almighty God.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure:
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

If ever there was prayer — personal, beautiful, touching — it is here.

Or again:

"Jesu, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide
Till the storm of life be past,
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last."

What is this? Surely prayer; and this:

"Renew my will from day to day,
Blend it with Thine, and take away
All that now makes it hard to say,
Thy will be done."

And this, sung often through rain of blinding tears:

"When our heads are bowed with woe,
When our bitter tears o'er-flow,
When we mourn the lost, the dear,
Jesus, born of woman, hear."

Yes, we all sing our prayers at times, and there are times when words borne aloft to God on wings of music seem wholly different from the same words spoken; dead hearts wake up, a thrill of reality runs through us and we feel; music has been made a positive channel of personal and abiding blessing.

Let us remember that the spirit of music is a gift of God, and that its sacred use has had His seal of divine approval again and again placed on it. Let us remember that it is a gift bestowed on higher beings than man; that the angels sang with joy as the glories of creation lay beneath them; that as heralds, all bright and beautiful, they made all heaven ring with song when Christ was born. On angels and man alike God has bestowed the precious gift, that whilst they use it to glorify Him above, we should use it in prayer and praise below, to swell His glory on earth as well as in the courts of heaven.

LENT.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Matt., iv : 1

One can only fancy that our Lord was placed in a position of temptation in order (as he expressed it elsewhere) to fulfil all righteousness. It was more for our sake than for his own he was tempted. But it should also be remembered that he was really tempted. We fail wholly to grasp both the object and result of the temptation, if we regard it as a kind of spiritual tableaux, where tears were shed without feeling, and cries were uttered without pain. According to St. Paul he actually suffered from temptation, "for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Of course the whole subject is so

intensely mysterious, and beyond the range of our spiritual vision that we naturally shrink from audacious speculations in connection with it; but these three facts that spring out of the record cannot be regarded as speculative. First, he really suffered from temptation. Second, he was sinlessly victorious over temptation, his victory was without spot or taint of defilement. Third, he was tempted, that he might throughout all time be touched with a fellow-feeling for our infirmities when we are tempted, for "he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

Now the order of our Lord's temptation is not without its strong lessons, and it seems to have been something like this. For forty long days he was tempted of the devil, that is, varied temptations were kept ceaselessly before his mind. Of these temptations we are told nothing definite; but one feels startled, and shamed, and horrified to think that these forty days may have brought all hell on earth, before the soul and mind of him who came to save from hell. Remember what we are told, that "He was tempted in all points as we are."

Even as he came to crush out all sin, so all sin arrayed itself to crush out him, and that for forty long days without let, or hindrance, or intermission ; an experience impossible for us to realize, for no one soul, save his, has ever passed through such a burning fiery furnace of devilish trial.

Well, whatever these temptations were, however varied the forms they took, there is no question of it that everyone of them failed, and then, as a final effort, the Tempter appeared to him in person. I cling, you notice, to the narrative, for never could I see in the record where the line could be drawn between figure and fact—in person, I say. But how did he appear ? None can say for certain, but here we may fairly speculate. It may have been in the grey darkness of the morning, or in the deeper darkness of night that the wearied eyes of the worn Saviour were blinded with a light of dazzling splendour, and forth from it stepped an angel form as near to God in beauty as angel form could be. for Satan, we are told, can transform himself into an " angel of light." There on the ground hunger-smitten, with restless mind and un-

strung nerves, and worn, wasted body, lies the Tempted One, and there, as if just come from the very presence of God in Heaven, bending over him, with eyes of matchless sympathy gazing into his, with face of surpassing loveliness close to his, with voice of softest music falling on his ear—there is the tempter :

"Come unto me and rest,"

he seems to say,

"Lay down thy head, thou weary one,
Lay down upon my breast."

"Command that these stones be made bread."

Now, does it not seem natural that it may have been thus ? Does it not seem natural that a pure being like Christ could only be tempted by some form of celestial purity, and that the highest art of Satan in tempting the son of God would show itself in something godlike. That the final struggle between good and evil in that weird wilderness would not be between purest good and deadliest evil in its most revolting form, but evil draped in such apparent godlikeness that the good would be lured to love it, and bless it,

and thank it, and look up to it as a help,—a messenger of mercy.

The greater temptation failed, as well as all others, but those forty days and nights were not in vain. For good and blessing, they speak straight home, and trumpet—tongued to us with our own wildernesses, and lenten days, and sore temptations, and devils on our track.

Putting the personal appearance of Satan to our Lord out of question, it has ever seemed to me, that the general system of temptation pursued towards Him, is as a rule, the system of temptation pursued towards us. First, the days of mental evil—the testing, trying, wearing days of deadly strife or self deception,—and then in an instant, just at the moment that we are weakest, the flashing forth of the terrible temptation, the point towards which all past temptation aimed, the one great temptation on which the die of victory or ruin is ever cast. First, the storm that deafens, as wind and rain and tempest beat from every quarter upon our heads, then the silence, and then the whole heavens seeming to burst above us, and the one deadly flash making

straight from the darkest spot to rive, to rend and tear us, and leave us a black and withered thing. But the storm is the forerunner of the flash, the flash the fruit of the storm.

Is it not awful, my friends, to think what child-like deceivers we are, not so much hypocrites as self-deceivers. How sometimes we positively lie to ourselves; how we allow evil to grow up in us, and wind its deadly arms around us, whilst we either ignore its existence or explain away its power.

We are in the wilderness for our forty days? temptation. I need not describe them to you. No crime is committed, no law of God or man is broken according to the letter of the law, but oh! God help us! we know we are going wrong, and yet we lie to ourselves, and say that we are free from guilt or danger of it.

It needs knife, or poison, or dagger to commit murder; it needs no instrument to think of murder. We can think of it in a pew with our Bible or prayer-book open before us, it can poison our sleep with deadly dreams, and as we think, or dream, the crime that all temptation tends towards seems less awful, and the penalty less dangerous. I say mur-

der, but I mean anything that step by step, and day by day, breaks down the moral feeling, and drags the man or woman down. O terrible mind, which can play and toy with sins of the deadliest power and leave no outward stain on a man's reputation. O awful land of vision, in which the trader, step by step pictures and weighs a possible fraud, the forger scribbles on trial the needed name, the profligate lingers in pleasing visions over his mental crime, the faithless wife pictures a possible flight, the youthful mind harbours sins that it dreads to give expression to! Yet sure as the dropping water wears the stone, so sure these days of mental libertinism undermine and sap the fortresses of truth. Go on and it will come (some day it must come) swift as the lightning flung from heaven, deadly as the thrust of poisoned dagger it will come; the one great, terrible temptation of a lifetime, and in that temptation the trader does the dishonest deed, the forger at long last writes the name, the profligate lets loose the reins of passion, the faithless wife is gone, and the young man is a prodigal and lost. "O awful wilderness," and yet we lie to our-

selves and call it a garden. We point to the parched grass as if it were brilliant flowers; we look at the dark clouds overhead and speak of the glorious sunlight, the screaming eagle seems a cooing dove, the barren rocks seem clothed with verdure, and then, one day the flowers fade, the rocks fall down and crush us, and the eagle tears the flesh from the outstretched arm of the body, that lies a bruised and bleeding thing beneath the fallen stone. First, the forty days of mental danger, and then the terrible temptation, the crowning act of Satan.

Brethren, the thing is real. You cannot hide it from yourselves. In some shape or form outside of us, around us and in us, is that which would appear in living form if it could, but which for us is all the more terrible, because we cannot see it, or touch it, or speak to it. But it is all around us, in youth and age, and weakness; in home, in solitude, in turmoil, in business and work and labour—some present, ever terrible voice which seeks to lure us to do wrong and pictures the wrong as happiness. It need not matter to you or to me whether all this wretchedness comes

from a personal devil, or from some inexplicable influence of evil, no more than it matters to the wreck, flung up on barren shores whether it were built by human hands or by magical machinery. The wreck is enough for me. There with rough, bare, jagged ribs, with rotting sea-weed round its keel, a wrecked, and lost, and ruined thing it lies; and so with souls innumerable dragged, down in the hurricane of forty days, and flung forth to rot on the bitter shores of one terrible temptation. Devil or no devil, there is the wreck, and it remains for the doubter to explain the secret of its ruin better, if he can, than God himself has done.

Is there then no refuge for you, for me—no safety for us? Yes, the safety that Christ had, the safety of Scripture teaching, Christ and the Christ life. The Christ dying for me, dead for me, trusted in by me, as drowning sailor trusts to rope, resting all on Christ for atonement, for pardon, for remission of sin, for the past, for perfect forgiveness—Christ and the Christ life-here is my safety. My willing in the strength of Christ, that evil shall not be my good, and my determination

to carry out that will if I starve for it, if I die for it. The Christ life, lived if needs be at the loss of everything that would seem at times to make life worth the living; the calm,quiet, unobtrusive, Christian life, but worth all lives because free from conscious, willing wrong-doing, and the curse and blight that follows that consciousness. The life is mine, if through Christ I will to live it, and yours, and the victory ours, if we will it, through Christ who died.

LENT.

The pains of hell gat hold upon me.

Psalm 116 : 3.

Our text teaches us how one may wake up here on the earth, on the earth where he has sinned, with the foretaste of eternal misery gripping him and stinging him, and with the awful knowledge in his heart and head, that as it is now, so it may be forever, and deservedly forever—and the sting and the torture is there—in the admitted fact that the misery is deserved ; that this awful reaping of the whirlwind is the natural consequence of all the seed of sin that we have sown with our own hands.

The fact is that men themselves testify to a hell, and thus, in one sense it needs no revelation. They testify by their own actions ; at times, by their utter inability to meet

bravely the natural consequences of their own sin, or by the deadly way in which they purchase escape from facing temporary disgrace or temporary punishment at the risk of all the terrible possibilities of the future. The "just reward" of their own deeds, admittedly the just reward, seems all at once to gather like a great bank of terrible storm-clouds above their heads, and they know that at a given time it will burst asunder, and they cannot dare to wait and face the storm. Anything, they say, but the waiting, anything but the exposure, anything but the degradation. The pains of hell, in advance of hell itself, seem to get hold of them, there is no escape open east or west, or north or south, from the just reward of their deeds. On it comes like steady tramp of marching men, or like crouching tiger on velvet paw, noiseless as death, "the just reward" of evil done; the reaping in cold and dark, and sleet, and hail, the reaping of a life's dread harvest. And so, ere the thunderclap bursts the man thinks, "If I am only silent and dead when it bursts it can do me no harm here, and I will run the risk or bear the pains of the harm it can

do me there, for anyway or anyhow the pains of hell have already got hold upon me."

So, I think, to some extent, thought Cain, when his crime seemed to him as if it had written itself all over him in blazing letters. When he seemed to take in literal earnest the divine prediction that his brother's blood would cry "murder" after him to the day of his death. "O God" (he prayed) "in mercy hush that voice, that only I myself may hear it. If future men should hear that awful truth, if they came to know what I did, if they knew who and what I was, why, God, they would rise up in righteous fury and murder me."

Just fancy a man in a state of mind like that, full of haunting fears and dread, hating to meet the keen, shrewd eye of his fellow-man, looking at every hand to speculate whether it holds a knife up the sleeve, dreading footsteps behind him, voices in front of him, and shrinking as from burning coal when hand of fellow-man laid lightly on his shoulder,sends thrill and throb through every nerve of body. Like Satan, he says "Where ere I go is hell, myself am hell."

Or fancy King Saul, in one sense magnificent Saul, with all his sins upon his head, lost in the bitterness of despair,—walking, riding, eating, sleeping, as it would seem to mortal eye, under the curse of God. Oh! what an awful failure of a life full of magnificent possibilities! As those wild eyes of his flung themselves back on his wasted years, and he saw nothing but great things that might have been accomplished, all wrecked and ruined; what pains of hell must have been there! And then how awfully tragic the bitter, bitter end. His sins crushing him to the earth in deadly retribution, his last great battle gone against him, his three sons dead on the field, his enemies on his own track to tear the crown from his head and brand the "once anointed of the living God, as the rejected of the living God;" does not all hell appear to rise up and claim him as he refuses to face the disgrace that must come upon him and flings his giant body on his giant sword and dies—the suicide. "The pains of hell," he might have cried, "have already got hold of me, why should I delay?" "Lost, everything lost, and justly lost,"—oh, there's the sting,

justly lost—"why should I wait for full disgrace on earth?"

Or fancy Judas carrying his hell about with him. Fancy his wretched eyes at long last, opened to the way in which step by step, from honour to dishonour, he was led to betray "the innocent blood." There must have been an awful retrospect opened to that man's eyes, for apart from shame and retribution of God, there was no solid earthly reason why he should have died as he did. Judaism would never have punished him, Rome would never have punished him, and there was no apostle under deadly vendetta pledged to take away his wretched life. But the man, you see, for at least three years had been toying with hell, for he who could live with Jesus, and in the end sell Jesus, must have been far gone in way of wickedness. I do not think he sold him intentionally to death, but he sold him. He sold his best and noblest friend if he did not know he sold his God. Time and sin and crime, had all combined to harden him, up to that state that he could do that deed,—sell his friend, or sell his God.

And then, all at once, all hell seemed to

burst open before the man's mind, and God through conscience rang out of it, "You have sold the innocent blood."

O deadly mockery of sin! O cursed villainy of sin, to lead us on step by step to do the deed and then to scourge us, and lash us, and mock us, through the deed we have done. And so those awful words chased that wretched man to his death. Chased him into the holy place of the temple where the priests sat. Chased him out of their mocking presence after he had flung the cursed coin at their feet. Chased him out into the darkness, a lonely, self-accused murderer, with every breath of air becoming a voice to ring out the accusation, "You have shed the innocent blood, you have shed the innocent blood." Chased him till the very prospect of death itself became to him a glowing mercy, till he grasped it as a gift, and hanged himself.

Now there are some striking and awful lessons in these terrible life records of bygone men.

How is it we get these feelings of shame and dread, or, as in the case of Judas, of re-

morse and misery arising from an overwhelming consciousness of ungrateful wrong-doing? The feeling must come solely from our sense of personal responsibility. But responsibility to whom? To outraged law and and an outraged God behind law, to that sense of right and wrong in us which makes man different from all other created things. Oh! it is so easy to sin against God, but the hardest thing in life to get rid of and shuffle off is God himself. We may mock at wrong-doing, but we are forced through our own God-endowed senses in countless cases, to curse it at the last as the bane, and blight, and misery of our wretched and degraded lives. Learn then your responsibility, not alone to yourself and your fellow-man, but to your God.

And we well may learn it, we who at times may think that we can play and tamper with sin, or we, who are tempted by the spirit of the age, to think, that "accident" is God, that there is no plan in the universe, that there is no providence, no retribution, no sting or lash for sin. These terrible spectres of the past start up out of their mournful

graves and hold out imploring hands to warn us not to come into the place of torment that they made for themselves. "For God's sake keep back," they say. "You little know what you are doing when day by day you break down your moral sense, when hour by hour you ignore God, then cease to reverence Him, then mock Him, and then blaspheme Him. One day all hell will rise up to meet you, and in that awful hour you may find yourself alone as we did—Cain, and Saul, and Judas."

And there is an awful lesson for the man or the woman who feels the decay of the god-like in them, and the strong growth of the devilish. Sunlight on the face, deadly progressive wickedness in the heart, the inward going down the twisting, slimy steps that lead to the awful door that opens to a touch and above which is written, "Abandon hope, abandon it, all ye that enter here."

God save us from that, in life or death, as, (thank God!) he can save the vilest "if we submit ourselves unto Him, if we take His easy yoke and light burden upon us, if we will confess our sins and plant our feet steadfastly

upon the holy road. This if we do, Christ will deliver us," and the pains of hell will get no hold upon us here or, better still, hereafter.

LENT.

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. xxv : 30.

There has been a good deal written in the public press of late, with regard to the question of future life, the darker side of it ; certain ecclesiastical trials, acquittals or condemnations, blowing into flame the sleeping embers of old and off-repeated arguments. As one mummy is very like another mummy, so one series of letters or articles on this question is little more than a re-arrangement of thoughts that have been repeated on every occasion the controversy has come up. There is nothing new, there can be nothing new in connection with the subject ; it has passed through every form that the chemical changes

of an argument are capable of being subjected to.

Years ago I gave this subject the closest personal study, and I have never seen any occasion to change the conclusion I then arrived at, which may be summed up in one thought; that it is waste of time to be arguing about shallows and margins, and foot depths, the meaning of this word, the meaning of that, whilst the great ocean itself, with its awful depths, is practically left unthought of.

God has given us a Book which Christian people believe, and have ever believed to be a revelation from him. This Book describes not only time, but all time, and it also undertakes to give us an insight into eternity. It deals with man as an immortal being, describing his life both here and hereafter as one life. What it says of life here is true to the letter. Whether speaking of joy or sorrow, sickness or health, sin or goodness, temptation or triumph, it speaks truth; what we positively know to be the truth because the experience of our daily lives confirms it. What it says of life hereafter we have every

reason to believe is equally true, for although we do not possess the confirmation of personal experience, we have no fair reason to believe that the description of life hereafter is incorrect; and, admitting the immortality of man, our experience here would teach us that good will ever call for reward and evil will ever call for punishment.

Well, this Revelation from God, as I said, describes the life of man in its present and future aspects, and no student of it as it deals with the future aspect can deny, that it distinctly teaches happiness and punishment beyond the grave, a state of conscious existence in which good meets its reward and sin meets its penalty. I need not quote beyond my text to prove this. Every student knows that it forms part of the plan of the revelation itself; the whole Book tends towards it as the closing act of divine interference with the life of man. Beyond death sin is punished, beyond death holiness, faith, purity, reap eternal harvests. If to us the Bible is God's revelation and our guide, then for us these two facts should stand out so clear and distinct that nothing but love of useless contro-

versy, or love of wasting time in worthless argument could lead us to deny them.

And indeed three parts of the arguments that are most popular in connection with this awful subject are really worthless as far as the main point of the revelation is concerned, and are of such a nature that they would never be seriously thought of as connected with that portion of the revelation which speaks of present life. When Jeremiah says "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes for the destruction of my people," we do not begin arguing about the depth of such rivers and the duration of their flow, but we naturally realize that the sorrows of his country caused the prophet great and poignant grief, and that, after all, is what the prophet meant us to know. So, when the Lord through Isaiah tells Israel, "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," we do not realize that the prophet meant that the whole nation was to pass through living fire, but that the good providence of God would be over it in great national crises, and that in spite of awful perils, it would come

out of them unharmed. It would never enter into our mind to make such figures of speech in connection with this life, subject of debate ; we would never dream of it, and yet when we come to talk over future life, like forms of speech at once assume doctrinal importance, and the wordy warfare wages about them rather than about the awful topic itself which they are simply used to give pictorial expression to.

For just as a person going through a forest may miss the main foot-track and become entangled in a maze of by-paths, so there is very great danger of controversially inclined minds, embarking on this subject, becoming so immersed in arguing about words, and phrases and expressions as to lead them to forget altogether the tremendous fact that whatever the Bible does not teach on this subject, there is one thing it certainly does teach as plainly as it teaches that " God made the heavens and the earth ;" and that is that in future life there is lasting punishment for the impenitent soul that dies in open rebellion against a God, whose existence, power and love that soul could realize if it only

willed to do so. No amount of argument which retains the Bible as a divinely reliable guide can ever shake this fact; the fact that there is punishment for impenitent souls that know what is right in God's eyes.

And this, after all, for you, for me, is the main fact to think about and to fashion our faith and lives in the light of. Suppose, after spending time and study on classifying all the scriptural and classical uses of the words "eternal," "everlasting," or such phrases as "for ever and ever," I come to the conclusion that they do not mean what in ordinary language they imply, what have I gained? I may be right, or I may be wrong, but what have I gained? I have not touched, nor would my studies in this direction lead me to touch, the question of future suffering for sin past and unrepented-of. That remains, as ever it has been, a great scriptural reality. I may place a limit of eternal remoteness to the word eternal as applied to punishment; in a spirit of hope I may see in eternal distances some ending to it, and some ending with light about it, and my speculations may bring with them a certain calm and ease of

mind ; but my remote relief does not touch the fact of punishment itself, and my eternal limits are so distant and undefined that past geologic ages seem near at hand as compared with them. The fact, the awful fact of necessary retribution remains, regard it as penal, regard it as remedial, what you will, and that after all is what you have to face as plain, practical, common-sense Bible-readers with souls to save. Your life here follows you into life beyond, over which Christ has cast the spell of pardon, as far as we know for none but the holy,—that is what we have to face.

Such controversies as I have spoken of seem to me like "Nero fiddling whilst Rome was burning"—he may have made fine music, but the grandest city in the world was burning all the time. And so I may argue and argue, and gain converts to my view that punishment is not eternal, cannot be eternal, and I may die in the midst of a most victorious argument, and wake up on the other side to the sure and certain knowledge of the fact that what presses on me is not desires as to remote contingencies, but the terrible solemnities of present condemnation. For certainly

the Bible teaches that as clearly as, on the other hand, it teaches "that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Whatever that condemnation is, the whole love of God in Jesus Christ has been poured forth to save us from it. For this He sent his own Son, for this Calvary will ever sound on human ears in tones of mingled shame and glory, for this Christ Jesus died. I judge of the misery of the condemnation by the price paid to save us from it. In the life of Christ I see everything that is purely human and gloriously divine concentrated, and I see this life of love, mercy and goodness sacrificed—for what?—ultimately for what? To save me from this condemnation. That is enough for me. The greatest sermon, the greatest argument, the most striking revelation connected with this condemnation is—the Cross of Christ. Why is He led forth as a lamb to the slaughter? Why is his soul poured forth unto death? Why do the olive trees of Gethsemane witness his misery, and the bare skull of Calvary send forth his death-cry in awful echoings? Why? To save me from this condemnation. Should not that be enough? "By Thy baptism, fasting and temptation, by

Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy cross and passion,"—O Lord, I guage the depth of my awful condemnation.

My present leads out into my future. I can see to-day, feel its sunshine, enjoy its passing beauty,—but to-morrow! O that terrible to-morrow? Egypt in its awful hour of blinding blackness was not darker than that to-morrow is to many. What fools we are to plunge into it with the wild, delusive infatuation ruling us, that because the darkness ultimately may lead out into light, we need not trouble ourselves about the darkness itself.—above all, when our "ultimately" is open to question, and the whole voice of the great spiritual past ranges itself against it. When Stanley plunged into the giant forest of Africa, he knew that if he only lived to push on he must come out into the sunlight, for Africa east and west is washed by an ocean. But of this darkness, "the blackness of darkness forever."—ah! where is the wisdom of speculating about it? Better accept it as an awful reality looming ahead of every one of us, and which alone can be escaped by our placing our hand in His, who is the "Light of the world," and saying "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

LENT.

Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not.

Luke xxii: 31.

What a strange thing human nature is, even when the affections are deeply centred on any one being, and sympathy aroused on his behalf. Here, midst the shade and gloom cast by the coming death of Christ on his disciples, these very same men sit in the shadow speculating, calculating, arguing, as to which of them would be the greatest when the troubles in some strange way would be over, and the kingdom of Christ would be revealed. Possibly Peter may have laid claim to the primacy, for our Lord seems to have singled him out from amongst the disputants as worthy of special warning. "Simon! Simon!

take care. Stop! If ever a man was in peril you are in peril. I know that Satan has asked to have you all as once he had Job, that he might sift you all, even as wheat is sifted. The question is not who shall be greatest, but who shall stand the sifting, and, Simon, you are in greatest peril from that sifting, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. For, O loving man, brave man, yet, O weak and unstable man, there is good in you. Your courage may leave you in that sifting, your vows and promises may be scattered as chaff is scattered; but I have made supplication for thee, that that which is thy leading characteristic may not fail thee—thy faith."

You all know how the satanic sifting came, how in the moment of our Lord's sorest need, "they all forsook him and fled." You know how the sifting came to Peter, how as the awful sieve of testing did its work in Pilate's judgment hall, but one grain of real wheat was left behind, and that was his faith, that clinging to Jesus, which would not allow that wretched man to go on blaspheming, denying, but which almost burst his heart,

and loosed the torrent of his tears and broke him down into abject penitence. "Sifted, sifted, you will be to the last grain, but I have made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not, whatever else fails. I have prayed that that might stand."

What doors of mystery all this opens into things invisible. Satan had asked to have Simon, John, Judas, Thomas, but what if Satan is asking to have me, if Satan is asking to have you? It is an old affair all this about Peter, but one soul is as well worth destruction as another, and who can tell, enveloped in mystery as we are, that Satan is not asking to have me or you or to have the noblest and best amongst us. O placid men and placid women, easy-going men and easy-going women, what an awful thought if one can but realize it! To think that the unseen power of evil that had his eyes fixed on Peter to keep him ever in view, that he might finally run him down and tear and trample on him, leaving him a mass of misery and mutilation, that those same eyes may now be fixed on you, on me, and with the same object in view, our remorseless and final degradation.

Have we not here some explanation of those awful and sudden lapses into sin by good and holy people, where the light of a lifetime is quenched in a moment, and brilliant stars fall from the clear vault of heaven into the blackness of darkness? "Satan has asked to have you that he may sift you, sift you as wheat is sifted." Or an explanation of those wild mad plunges into sin, where conscience and love and hope, are one and all flung aside as worthless, and the soul, like travellers mad with thirst in the desert, drinks anything, however foul, that it may meet the awful craving? To-day David, to-morrow Judas, the next day myself, yourself. O placid men and placid women, are these things true? Is it possible that the old words once uttered in the birth-room of the Blessed Sacrament, have run their course through hoary centuries, and to-day strike on my ears and yours, "Satan has asked to have you that he may sift you, sift you as wheat is sifted?"

"But I have made supplication for you that your faith fail not." Peter after all had a far greater power on his side than all the powers of hell arrayed against him; he had the Lord

Jesus Christ. Beautiful, beautiful is this undesigned evidence of the hidden life of Christ that none but God the Father knew. Peter, did you ever know that your master prayed for you, singled you out, thought over your dangers, realized your weakness, and somewhere, perhaps in the mountain, "a great while before day, went down on his knees and prayed." O my Father, the time is coming when Peter will be sifted, grant that whatever fails him, his faith in thee may last? Did you ever know that, Peter? Nay, I fancy he never knew it till Christ told him. He knew that his Master prayed often and long, he knew that He had taught him how to pray, but he never knew till now, how his Lord had held him on his heart, thought of him when he was thoughtless, and followed him through trials yet to come that He might guard him in the midst of dangers. O what music there was in the words "I have made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not!" How far Peter realized their power then, it is not easy to say, but oh! how like Heaven opened, their loving tenderness must have broken in on his soul in the hour of his bitter,

tearful humiliation, and in hours oft-repeated in his after-life of glorious labour, how like sunlight they must have brightened many a scene of darkness! "I have made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not. O Father, his courage may fail, his consistency may be blotted, his boldness in confession may weaken, but whatever fails, let not his faith fail."

If the mystery of evil and wrong is powerful for our undoing, here is a Power on our side, as well as Peter's, far greater for our good. Oh! who amongst us can tell how often this "blessed help" of ours has "made supplication," has used that wondrous power (which is His, whereby He reads us through and through) to inspire his prayer, to plead for us by name, to help us in our quest after goodness, and to save us from many a mortal and deadly sin? As standing on the very verge of unmistakable wrong-doing, what at times has mysteriously held us back, and given us a strong foothold on the solid earth behind us? May it not have been the power of the act expressed in the words, "I have made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not."

What we all need in this world of sin and dark temptation is Christ. To trust him, to know him, to lean on him, depend for everything on him, that is what we want. To go out into this world of sin and controversy and wranglings, and doubt, and discord and disorder, and as all about us at times seems chaos and confusion, so that one scarce knows what to think or where to look, to feel that there is Christ, and to rest everything on that rock which never can be shaken. The "sifting" is my destiny and yours. I cannot avoid it, come when it will, but if Christ be on my side, if He owns me, weak though I be, the victory in some shape will be mine. The vessel of my life, storm-torn and rent, may bear on it the marks of terrible disaster; but it will not strike the rocks and sink. Its safety lies in the words of Him on whom I lean for everything, "I have made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not."

GOOD FRIDAY.

He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah, liii: 5.

The Jewish translation of the old Masoretic text renders this wonderful passage as follows: "Yet He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and through his bruises was healing granted to us." The application of the passage is made to the Messiah.

You notice that the Jewish and English translations are almost identical, and that any slight verbal difference in the Jewish rendering heightens, if possible, the idea on which all Christianity is based, "that Christ suffered — the just One for us unjust — to bring us to

God, and that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.

In speaking however of the substitutionary sufferings of Christ, it is frequently objected that the whole idea of substitution is an old Jewish or heathenish idea, and that it really forms no necessary part of the Christian mode of salvation. That it is a Jewish idea is apparent, but that it is not a Christian one is by no means so clear. Indeed, it is hard to find anything of Christianity which has not some remnant of the blood of Judaism coursing through its veins; for Christianity is but a divine development of the older creed, and nowhere have we a stronger infusion of Jewish doctrine than in the Christian idea of the substitutionary character of our Lord's atonement. Because, on this point, Christianity had nothing novel about it; it simply transferred the sacrificial idea from the goat, or pigeon or dove of Judaism to the personal Christ of Christianity.

See the proof of this. The Lord's Supper, instituted by Christ immediately before his death, was based wholly and in the clearest possible manner on the foundation

of personal substitution. St. Luke tells us that during the feast Our Lord took the bread and said: "This is my body which is given for you," — and, likewise, the cup, saying, "This is my blood which is shed for you;" or, as St. Matthew renders it, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Here the substitutionary idea is so strong, that if we abstracted it from the Feast, we would commit a spiritual murder, that is, we would be taking the life of the thought.

Not less clear is the direct scriptural teaching which tells us that "the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many," that "Christ died for the ungodly," that "whilst we were sinners Christ died for us," that He was made sin for us," that "He, in his own person, bore our sins in his body upon the tree," that "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Now, if you take the substitutionary idea from these and countless verses of a like nature, you again palpably and openly commit a spiritual murder.

Take for instance the text, "Christ died for

the ungodly," blot out the words which convey the substitutionary idea, and there remains nothing beyond the bald obituary record, "Christ died." But that statement is of no religious value. Pontius Pilate died, Herod died. Leave in the words "for the ungodly," and you then possess a statement that you could never apply in its literal sense to any man. Christ died; but if he died, he did so for the ungodly.

Why there should be Christly substitution for our personal sins, neither I, nor any one receiving the Word of God as an inspired revelation, have any right to surmise. It is not revealed. It is one of those awful mysteries connected with spiritual things which God brings out of the darkness of eternity and handing to us, says: "You are saved by faith; believe this, and this, and this, and show your faith." The doctrine is presented to me as a divine fact to be realized by faith, just as I am told that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Why He created them I am not told, beyond the fact that they "declare His glory," and behind that it is utterly useless for me to go. Behind that is

God with his great unrevealed secrets, one of which is the necessity of a substitutionary Saviour.

But it is said that it seems hard, if not positively unjust, that the pure and spotless Jesus should suffer in the place of impure and tainted men, — that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. Well, I admit it does seem hard, but things are not always what they seem.

In the first place the mystery springs out of the noblest aspect of love ; and who can sound the depths of love's power ? Love planned the atonement, and there is no fear or harshness in love. It was because God loved the world that he sent His only Son to die, and it was because Christ loved his own, and loved them to the end, that He came to die. We may picture the road back from the cross to the door of the great eternal secret as one of harshness, injustice, and even cruelty; but when the door opens, Love opens it, and the light from its face shines down the whole dark way, till it strikes on the cross itself and makes it brilliant.

Again, hard and harsh as the demand for

atonement seems to us, it was not so to Christ, for that atonement was made of his own free will and accord. "Greater love (He saith to his disciples) hath no man than this, — that a man lay down his life for his friends. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." Here there is not a whisper of injustice or harshness or even dissatisfaction, but a loving announcement of a generous sacrifice, an answer from Christ's own lips to all objections.

But, putting all this aside, I ask: Why should we arraign and find fault with the fact of the innocent Christ, willingly and lovingly surrendering life to save a guilty world, when the harsh principle without, often, the actual willingness, surrounds and hems us in on all sides in every position of life, and that, not only without arraignment on our part, but often creating a spirit of lofty praise and laudation?

For, what is life, but a long record of the innocent suffering for the guilty?

Look at it where it touches us most. Why are godly and consistent parents forced at times to shed bitter tears over lost and out-

cast children? Why are sober, steady wives or mothers who, if widowed or alone to-morrow, would gain an ample livelihood,—why are they forced to drag out a life of wretched misery, chained to drunken, degraded husbands, or selfish, abandoned sons? Just because they are irresistibly obeying the law incomprehensible, yet apparently inevitable, — they, the innocent, are unquestionably, and often willingly, suffering for the guilty.

Look at it in the highest spiritual light. Christianity claims to be a cure for sin; great preachers and teachers of the Gospel are, as great spiritual doctors, meant to minister for good to guilt and shame and wickedness. Now, it is an undoubted fact that Christianity never was nobler, grander and more powerful for good than at those periods of time when martyrdom was common. If you divide the history of the Church into epochs you will find three remarkable ones: the Apostolic, the early Christian, and the Reformation epochs. All these were times when the doctors of Christ went forth with divine courage, fought spiritual disease and sin with the truest bravery, did marvels for the cause

of Christ in saving souls, but died themselves the cruelest of deaths for the sake of those amongst whom they laboured. The apostles died as martyrs, the early christians died as martyrs, the reformers died as martyrs, — heroes of innocence, they died for the guilty.

And, even in our own day, who are the heroes that gain the world's highest praise? Surely substitutionary heroes: Livingstone and Bishop Hannington in Africa, Bishop Patteson in Melanesia, Gordon at Kartoum; such men need no earthly titles or dignities to mark them off from the common herd. Here is the true nobility of Christian heroism before which the world stands with uncovered head — mute and awestruck — the innocent who go to death to save the guilty or to seek the lost.

But "it is not right," you say. Men like Livingstone should never have died such deaths; good wives should never suffer at the hands of bad husbands; doctors and clergymen should never perish through drawing in the infectious breath of poverty-stricken patients who can never repay them for the risk. If God is the God you claim him to be, he should never allow such things.

Ah! my friends, do you not see that God's plan is: First, to show his love to us, and, secondly, to teach us how to love, and that you cannot have love without loss, and, sometimes, without suffering, — that humanity rises into magnificence just in proportion as it suffers for others. Carry out your policy, and where do you leave room for love and hope and forgiveness and charity and self-denial, and unselfishness to work in? You simply murder them in cold blood, you kill out all my chances of cultivating and practising such divine characteristics the moment that you bring me to believe that it is unfair, unjust, and cruel, to ask me to bend my back to bear a brother's share of a brother's sufferings, and often a brother's guilt.

What is the truest love? That which ceases not to say, "I love you," or that which is ready to bear anything that the object loved may be benefited and blessed? Surely the latter. True love proves itself best, not by its gratification, but by its patient unselfishness, by its surrender of what often it longs and thirsts for, by its dogged determination to show its depth and power through its self-

denial and ceaseless surrender of what it would have otherwise. This is the highest love, and, as such, the truest.

Away from such thoughts, and back to the awful cross, with our lessons from life ; and though we may not be able to fathom all its mysteries, surely we can learn something of its object. Through Christ it was meant to teach us "God's love." He so loved us that He sent his Son. Through Christ it was meant to bring us back to the God that loved us ; that by his cross and passion, by his cruel death and burial, the outcast prodigal might rest his head upon his Father's breast.

I raise my eyes in loving gratitude to the bleeding form, and all that I have ever learned of its meaning leads me to say : O God ! the greatest evidence of Thy love was bringing Christ to the cross ; and, O Christ ! the greatest evidence of Thy love was in dying on it, for on that cross Thou wert wounded for my transgressions, Thou wert bruised for my iniquities ; the chastisement of my peace was upon Thee, and by thy stripes I am healed. "Thine" and "Mine." Thy love, my sins ; Thy devotion to death, my devotion to evil.

Surely, Lord, it is true of Thee, "that greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for sinners."

GOOD FRIDAY.

And Jesus said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

St. Luke xxiii: 34.

These words were spoken from the cross of Christ. The death spell is on them, for the Cross has its message to the world as well as the life of Him who lay on it. He speaks through his life, He speaks through his cross, it become vocal with his love.

The most awful day that the world has ever seen has dawned, and the Son of God is crucified between two thieves. He came unto his own, and his own crucified him; He came as the final fruit of all God's merciful dealings with the sins of men, and man murdered him. The whole scene, view it how you will, is simply awful; there is only one thing that redeems it, — the Lord

himself, his own blessed words that turned the tree of shame into a symbol of divine glory, and foremost among them the pitiful, loving, generous words: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Now, what do these words mean? They mean: "Father, I ask forgiveness for these people, for they have not the faintest conception of the crime they are committing. They think that they are crucifying the Son of Joseph and Mary. That I am the Messiah, the summing-up of every prophet's voice, the fulfilment of every divine promise, — above all, that I am "God incarnate in the flesh,"— O Father, they have never once thought of such things. Forgive them, forgive their sins and crime of ignorance; they are like children,—they do, and know not what they are doing; Father, forgive them."

But can men crucify the Son of God ignorantly? Our answer is the plea of Christ's own prayer, "They know not what they are doing," — words endorsed by St. Peter when pleading with the Jews: "I wot through ignorance ye did it,"—words repeated by St. Paul: "Had they known they would not have cru-

cified the Lord of Glory," — words that disclose a field of divine mercy that people think but little of, but that St. Paul clung to as one secret of his own forgiveness as a persecutor of God's Church: "I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief."

Look up at the Cross, and see how its shadow falls to shade the very people that Christ prayed for. What was Pentecost? It was the supplement of the Cross on Calvary. Who are these that throng round Peter and on whose heads the divine light is playing? Who are these three thousand that throng round the blessed Feast of love, and cry to their God in the name of Jesus? Who are these five thousand who in one day find within the Jewish temple itself a new altar bearing for their sins a new and an everlasting Sacrifice? Who are these that on the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, scattered themselves as "Christ-bearers" and erected a spiritual Calvary in the hearts of the multitudes of Samaria? Every one of them is of the nation that murdered Christ. It may be that there were thousands amongst them who, if they did not cry, "Crucify

him," would have cried it if they had the opportunity. Yes, Pentecost was the supplement of Calvary. Out of His side "came blood and water," and out of heaven, straight from the heart of God, a storm of divine blessing and benediction that tore and rent the hardest hearts, that scattered the darkness, that dimmed the blindest eyes, and that formed the grandest answer that could be given to the Prayer: "Father, forgive them."

Who dare place bounds to the power of that answer? Why every blessing we possess is due to these pardoned men? The Gospel we talk of and trust in, the Church of God, the victories of the Cross, the glorious army of martyrs and confessors, the loud shout of millions who proclaim: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father;" — to whom do we owe these blessings and inspirations? To that strange, mysterious nation, blinded, ignorant, and in unbelief, for whom the Master prayed in his agony of death: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

And who dare limit the spirit of the prayer?

Who dare use it as mercy for the ignorant Jew and withhold it from the ignorant Gentile? Oh! this Cross does more for the world than we in our petty thinking give it credit for.

It is one of the horrors of modern civilization, that as yet you cannot have it without its deadly fringe of darkest ignorance. In all great centres of seething life, where highest art and culture reign; as if to humble and correct the haughty, the savagery of Africa seems to nestle in the bosom of Europe. Underneath the glory and the education and the wealth, is a putrid mass of ignorance, degradation and misery, so awful and overwhelming, that the noblest and the best of Christians stand dazed before it. O God, help us! is there nothing but hell for these outcast, blinded, ignorant poor, darker sometimes than the fetich-worshippers,—for these, at least, worship a fetich?—Is there no balm in Gilead for such as these! I trust the cross of Christ; some way good must come out of it for them; there must be mercy mingled in its blood, though my doctrinal chemistry may not have the power of analysing it. I

trust the cross of Christ. If I am beaten with many stripes, surely they with few. I trust the cross, if or nothing more than the ringing glorious prayer of divine and noblest pity: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Who dare limit its power for mercy? For, what are these masses of civilized misery of which I have been speaking, as compared with the millions of heathen that have never heard the name of "Jesus,"—who could not hear it, — for, how can they hear without a preacher? I do not believe that there is one tribe on earth without some religion. As hunted African hides from slave-hunter in swamp and forest; as, torn and bleeding, he drags his wearied frame into deeper depths of hidden darkness, so these wretched beings outside of the Gospel seem in their unaided searches after God, to get deeper and deeper into the depths of spiritual degradation. O God, help them! Must all their bitter journeyings end in blackest hell? Again I trust the cross of Christ — how, I know not, but I trust it, — He died for all. Surely the Cross must have pity for those who, seeking for the

light, wander farther from it the more they seek, and surely it has.—" Father, he cries, forgive them, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Then you say: better the heathen than the Christian, mercy without responsibility. Be fair. Would you strip you, and make you bare, and change places with the heathen to buy your mercy at the hands of God cheaply? You would never do it. Then make not the hidden mercy that the Cross may secrete for the heathen, the paltry excuse for your rejection of its poured-out blessings. If you have responsibility, your blessings go to make up the sum total of all your earthly happiness.

Now, have we, we who worship here to-day, sins of ignorance that will fall under the influence of this wondrous prayer? I guage not, — God forbid I should, — the power of God's eyesight, as it pierces into the hidden depths of human motives and, separating them, says,—this was born of ignorance, this of keenest knowledge. I believe the young often sin through ignorance, and God knows it, and unknown it may be to them the Cross pardons them freely; but I can tell you that

our sins of ignorance must, in the nature of things, be few and far between. Since you have entered into years of active life, dealing with men, have you often done wrong when you did not know you were doing wrong? Oh, no; this prayer has little to say to us, we have little to say to it; nine-tenths of us stand outside its influence.

And yet, thank God, the Cross has its cry for us: "It is finished." What is finished? The great act of solitary and irresistible atonement which covers every phase and form of guilt,— my guilt, your guilt. God's love poured out through the blood of Christ, if I will but take it to my heart and give myself to Christ. Christ said: "Forgive thy brother, not seven times, but seventy times seven;" and as on this day He lies on the cross to which I should have been nailed, — "my Saviour, my substitute," He speaks to me in love and says, — not seventy times seven will I forgive, but day by day, hour by hour, at any time, at any moment that your heart cries out in penitence: "Turn Thy face from my sins and blot out all my misdeeds."

That cross of Christ is to me the most won-

derful thought connected with my life, for live how I will, speak how I will, teach how I will, I cannot plunge my hand into my heart and tear out the strange mystic threads that link that cross with my own individual being. What is the strangest fact connected with individual life and that people notice least? Not the fact that I am a great soldier, or a great poet, or a great philosopher, or a great politician; these are small things as far as strangeness is concerned, for the strangest thing that could be said of me is the truest—"There goes a man for whom God died." O! think of it when sins beset you, and grief wears you, and age steals in on you, and sickness weakens you; think of it when pride possesses you, and self-love poisons your blood, and the avenging of wrong-doing is haunting you like a shadow. Stop! Think! All is not lost as long as your mind and soul grasp the wondrous revelation,—"I am a man for whom God died."

Of all strange things woven into the warp and woof of your being, this is the strangest; and, surely, I am not wrong when I say, the best.

GOOD FRIDAY.

There was darkness over all the land.
Matt. xxvii : 45.

The awful earthly tragedy which, with solemn worship we meet to commemorate this day, stands out alone and unique in the record of all tragedies ; there is nothing like it in the history or traditions of man. Amongst its startling characteristics we are told that as the hours of that awful day followed each other, there was darkness over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour, as if nature, less insensible than man, refused to look on such a spectacle. "Darkness over the whole land." Instead of the fierce heat of a Syrian sun beating down in mid-day fury on stream and field, on narrow streets of town or village, on crowded thoroughfares of the great city,—dense terrifying darkness

was everywhere throughout the land, whether it stole quietly into weary rooms of sickness and round dying beds, or broke up childish games in Jewish streets, and slowly filled the temple with its awful gloom; or whether in one moment it spread itself like a gigantic pall over the doomed city, we are not told, — but darkness was everywhere. And with darkness came, you may be sure, that silence which darkness ever brings. Fancy the crowded city with its millions steeped in blindness whilst a deep "hush" brooded over throbbing hearts that beat irregularly in nervous expectancy; for who could tell, what next? what next? And there, in the darkness, Jesus dies; a mother's eyes can scarcely see Him, or He the mother to whom he speaks, or the beloved disciple to whom He gives his sacred charge. There, in the darkness, Jesus dies; a great and terrible cry, as of mortal agony, breaks the awful silence, —the head falls, the Lord of light and life is dead,—and darkness is over the whole land.

There were other awful voices and portents that followed and spoke to the doomed city. The great temple, save for the holy lights, is

in darkness, and thousands of beating hearts within its walls surely ask, — What next? what next? Aye, what next? There is the cry from the green hill outside the city wall, and at that very moment the crowds within the temple see in the dim distance the giant curtain of gold and purple rend itself from top to bottom, and there, behind its falling folds, lies open to the common gaze, the place of God, the sacred room, — the holiest place of all. No human eyes ever dared to look within that curtain, save those of the great high priest once in every year; no human foot impressed itself on its dusty floor save his; and yet, O horror of horrors to every pious mind! just as the death cry rang out from the cross on Calvary, at that very moment, Jehovah seemed to rend and tear his own temple to pieces, and to abandon, as if in righteous anger, the holy place where His honour dwelleth. Not only is the curtain severed, but the temple shakes, and the rocks are rent, and in long hours after the graves are flung wide open in the homes of death, and frightened men, and trembling women tell how in that awful week, when Jehovah

stripped his temple and made it bare, they saw their dead, they saw their dead alive

"Darkness over the whole land," and Jesus dying in the midst of it to save the souls of men. The cross all full of power and eternal force, the Saviour all full of undying, unquenchable love, in the midst of the darkness. When the darkness was deepest, one standing on the summit of the skull-shaped hill might easily have fancied that no cross was there, no Christ. Yet, if such an one had blindly groped his way, with outstretched hand, erelong he might have touched the bleeding feet of Christ himself. Groping in the darkness my hand might have touched my Lord. "Darkness over the whole land;" yet love, and strength, and pardon, and forgiveness in the midst of the darkness. It is there, close to me, though I see it not. It is so dark I can see nothing; but if I wait till the ninth hour is passed, there, on the crest of the hill, dim, misty, forcing its way upward, is something, and yet, a little longer — and very close to me—is a cross, and on the cross Jesus Christ who died to save me from my sins. In deepest darkness the cross of Christ is there, — and

Christ; and when the darkness passes, there is Christ and there is the cross.

There is a darkness, mental, spiritual, that ometimes settles down upon the soul. We believe nothing in the past, doubt most things in the present, have no hope of anything in the future. God and Christ, and faith in life to come, are names and phrases used by other men, but to us mere words, — our faith is going fast, or it is well nigh gone or dead. "There is darkness over the whole land," far as the land reaches. "Light, all thy comforts once I had; but here am I this death-dark night, not mad, not mad," — only faithless and unbelieving. Well, Christ is in that darkness; if you grope with outstretched hand you will find him, and finding him find the source of all the light your soul craves for. For he died in the darkness, that he might be with you in your darkness, himself, his cross, near to you, close to you, though you see him no .

There is a darkness that sweeps in on us as the penalty of our own sin,—the darkness of remorse, the whip of conscience, the fear of judgment, here or elsewhere. "There is dark-

ness over the whole land." We not only feel it all about us, but our heart tells us it is the "due reward of our deeds;" for, neither blindfolded or dragged have we entered into it, but of our own free will, and we have lived in it, and almost learned to love it, save when the whip of conscience fell and ate into our shrinking flesh. "Darkness over the whole land." Who or what are we that we should ever claim the pity of our insulted God? Yet Christ is in that darkness, and there to atone, to pardon, to pity and forgive; there for you, for me, in the lowest depths, for out of the darkness comes the pleading voice: "Father," it cries, "forgive them." We cannot see Him, we hear the cry and know He is there.

There is a darkness that sweeps in on us at the last; it may be for a moment or it may keep stealing in on us for days, — the darkness of death. God alone can tell how soon the best of us may feel it. It has been called the valley of the shadows, and the shadows deepen as we pass onward. But here for all the good and true, the faithful yet stumbling, the weak yet loving,—even here, in the darkness of death itself, is Christ and the cross.

We may not see him, for, oh ! the darkness is dense and our eyes are blinded, but out of the darkness we hear His voice bearing the message that our soul pants to hear: "Verily I say unto you, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." "Darkness over the whole land," but Christ and the Cross in it all the time, and nothing coming forth from it for you, for me, but messages of the divinest love.

SUNDAY BEFORE EASTER.

Love never faileth.

1 Cor. xiii : 8.

The great, though oftentimes unuttered question of the day with many is, whether after death we shall exist or not? We trace the earthly record of one we love from the cradle to the grave, and then, that which we knew so well and valued disappears, is gone. It is not that his outline has become dim and blurred, but that he is so gone as to leave a vacant place that in one sense to us can never be filled. Our hand is stretched out to touch, and there is nothing to touch. The friend, the foe, the companion or the counsellor, is gone.

Now, the widespread though often unuttered question is: does he exist elsewhere, and will he continue to exist? Is he who is

gone, a conscious, personal, reflecting being elsewhere even as he was here, or is he so gone as to be lost to recovery; is he wiped out of being as the flame of a candle is blown out.

Christianity developing the universal thought of widespread humanity claims that he lives. It argues that the soul—that which animates the body and is the real life — is immortal, and it argues this, first, from the natural thirst for immortality characteristic of human nature; then from the universal belief in immortality, and, finally, from the direct revelation of God which quenches the thirst and meets the universal belief. In fact, the immortality of the soul is the root idea of Christianity, its whole object being that of showing how the soul can be prepared in its mortal state for a happy immortality.

It is objected, however, that the presumptive argument of the Christian in favour of immortality is largely connected with the feelings and affections of mankind, and that his hopes are based on sentiment and can never stand the test of calm, keen, judicial investigation.

Your judicial materialist rules out sentiment. He places a stone before you. He tells you that it is composed of silica, and lime, and other mineral substances. Then he lectures you on Man and shows you how man is made up of material of a like nature, how he is an animated collection of lime, and phosphorus, and water, and so on, and how, when he ceases to be animate, he consumes away into a few ounces of mineral matter. Then he places the mineral outcome of a Shakespeare, a Livingstone, an Alexander, side by side with the stone, and says: "Be sensible, use your calm judicial reason, you do not claim personal immortality for the stone, why claim it for the man?"

I reply: Largely on account of the very affections and the sentiment which you make so little of, and practically refuse to allow to enter into the subject. For, man, although admitted to be bodily a chemical combination, is possessed of affections, and intellect, and will; and it is manifestly unfair to leave these, or what is the natural offspring of these, out of your comparison between a stone and a man.

There are, you know, certain circumstances of distorted and diseased life which practically reduce the body of man almost to a state of stone; and one of the greatest of past French writers has pictured such a state in one of his most marvellously drawn characters. It is that of an old man of clear intellect, and strong affections and dislikes, so wholly paralysed that his only means of communicating with the world of life about him is through the movement of his eyes, responding negatively or affirmatively to an alphabet held up before him, until words and sentences were spelled out as expressive of his thoughts. And yet this man of stone sits like a mighty fate or providence in the midst of a perfect web of complicated and slowly developing crime, shielding and guarding those he loved from plots of which they had not the faintest idea, and steadily, day by day, hemming in the plotter until he brings her face to face with her judgment and crushes her to the very death. And that, without movement of hand, or sound of voice, or following footstep. All done midst the silence of death itself, all done by a man of stone.

Such a case is by no means impossible; it simply postulates what, at any time might exist, a paralysed body, utterly worthless, yet holding within it—as broken case might hold a costly jewel—a magnificent mind, brilliant with undimmed intelligence, and using that intelligence to shield the pure and innocent through the channels of the old man's undying affections.

Now, in such a possible case, where, I ask, is your real man? In the arm and hand lifted up by another only to fall back as a dead thing, — is he there? In the tongue useless alike to bless or curse,— is he there? In the total weight of the dead body as he sits in the chair,—is he there? Are these the things that made the man? If so, your man and the stone may be placed side by side, and your materialist may well ask: Where is the difference?

But, mark you, this dead mass is loved; what is it that is loved,— the dead paralysed matter? No. What is loved is all that that man ever did when he was able to do it to those who love him, and the man to them is that still living affection that looks out at

them through the moving eyes and says: "I — I, that nursed you as a child; I, that taught you; I, that loved you as the dearest object of my life, I am alive still. I, the living I, that did these things through hands and voice and other instruments — now all useless — I am alive." That's what they love, and it is that which makes the real man.

Now, my friends, if this could be, — as indeed it could with you to-morrow, —do you not see the palpable injustice, if not the utter folly, of ruling out the affections and mind in our thoughts of man, and then proceeding chemically to show that there is really no difference between man and the stone when we reach the ultimatum of his earthly being. That which is loved is what the stone can never have, and what you cannot fairly think of the man without, the affection or the passion which speaks for good or evil through hand, and eye,and foot, which moulds the man and creates his character apart from every cell and fibre and nerve of his body. The man Cæsar Borgia, for instance, was not the lovely face that lied in every look, but that which looked out through the face and planned a

death whilst wishing long life. The man Stephen was not the mass of bloody flesh which men carried to the burial, but that glorious thing that lived and moved in works for God and leaped upwards and outwards as the flesh cried out: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

And so it is wherever death strikes the loveable. If we could even preserve in perfection of beauty and sweetness the body of one whose life had become part of ours, Oh! cannot you fancy how that ever mute cold, yet lovely object would become to us, just in proportion to the depth of our love, a horror rather than a help? It is said of Herod that he preserved for years the body of the murdered Mariamne whom, spite of his wild jealousy, he passionately loved. If so, he possessed her still. He had all of Mariamne that your materialist thinks worthy of notice, and yet the cry of that wretched man was: "O Mariamne, Mariamne, come back to me." If the story be true, Mariamne was materially with Herod, but her voice and look and touch of love were gone, nothing could revive that for Herod, and that was the real Ma-

riamne — not the features however lovely or the stately form so cold and still.

And that is ever the real man or woman. It is the love and work and ceaseless goodness of the mother, the wife or friend that we mourn the loss of when death touches either. It is the giant intellect and noble impulses bursting forth into magnificent regenerative plans, that make a nation mourn when a statesman dies. Not your lime and your phosphorus and your this and your that; but great deeds, great thoughts, great love, deathless unselfishness,—these are the things that make your real man.

Now, where you have these things, the question will arise: Were they all meant to come to nothing? Is it reasonable to suppose that the look of a mother containing within it the love and work and devotion of a lifetime, is all summed up into a closing earthly glance; is it reasonable to suppose that there is the glance, brilliant with the light of intelligence and love, and then the fate of the stone that never thought, that never loved, that never lived to mould and help and bless others? Is it reasonable to suppose a

magnificent being like Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, as intellectual as she was holy, should give that look to her son as she did, and then all her beauty of life and beauty of soul and beauty of mind, was crushed into nothingness in an instant, as a giant would crush a flower in his hand? Is it reasonable? "Is "the structure built with such pains only "built in order that it may be annihilated? "Are the parts elaborately and delicately put "together in order that one rude moment "may shatter the work in pieces?" and, above all, is the hand of the desolater to strike just at the moment when (as sometimes happens) the life is most perfect and its blossoms are the purest?

Hence I hold that the great foundation presumption for a future state of existence may be found in these qualities and affections which go to make up the character of him who possesses them, and, therefore, the action of materialism in dismissing them rudely from the field of thought is as heartless as it is unreasonable. For man can never be as the stone till love and bravery, till holy zeal and deathless devotion to things that make for

good, be wiped out as clean as if they never were. And, even then, affections and qualities for evil would still remain gigantic intellectual forces, widespread social forces, great in wickedness and sin and shame, but great, intellectually great, great enough to lead men to ask whether even they can wholly die through death.

Brethren, the fair presumption is that we are immortal; but beyond that presumption, nature can teach us nothing. As the heart beats through the affections, it beats through immortality; as the mind thinks, the thoughts run outward, not to shatter themselves against barriers of stone, but to spread themselves on oceans that know no shore, on scenes that know no horizon, and hence nature can give but little comfort; she breathes on us a breath that has the perfume of immortality, but nothing more. The only lasting comfort is in Christ, who, entering the darkness, gives us light through the magic words: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on Me, though he be dead, yet shall live." May this coming Easter give us the full light that nature alone could never give us.

EASTER.

Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee.

Ephes., v: 14.

The idea of sleep is used in three main senses in Scripture. First, the natural rest of the body; second, the sleep of spiritual sloth or sinful security, freedom from sense of danger; third, the sleep of death. The first is God's sweet gift to man; the third is inevitable, it waits us all; the second is our own, we make it, we foster it, we mix the poison with our hands.

Now, it is to this second idea of sleep that our text refers. Darkness holds the heavy sleeper, it conduces to, and maintains sleep. What wakes us, as a rule, is the silent operation of growing light, and the wakeful state is largely maintained by the steady shining

of the light. Hence dark, gloomy days are, with many, drowsy days, whilst the bright pouring in of steady sunlight, free from burning heat, conduces to and maintains vigor, wakefulness, brightness.

All this the apostle lays hold of when speaking to you, to me, of our senseless security, as we exist between the two eternities,—the eternity of the past out of which we have come, the eternity of the future into which we are going. Between the two, and as if neither concerned us, we are as if in a deep sleep, the darkness of security, or the darkness of positive sin, or the darkness of selfish sloth and worldly laziness holds us, and on, on we sleep, every hour bringing us nearer the eternity that lies before us, for there is no wakefulness in the darkness.

If it be true that what we understand by the world, — the principle of ignoring God, that self may be foremost,—if it be true that that is an element of darkness, we need not expect that ever to wake us; why should it? This power, when active, exists to keep us away from God, away from all thoughts of eternity. The leading article of its creed is,

—"Live for yourself, get all the pleasure, the happiness, the enjoyment you can out of your own life, never mind anybody else's; get it out of money, out of pleasure, out of open flagrant sin, if needs be, but get it, and get it for yourself." In the fashionable aspect of the world, it is regarded as "bad taste" to allow the religious idea in its spiritual aspect to come to the front at all. The fires may be beneath Herculaneum, but the fact should never be referred to. Be charitably silent to anything however wrong, so long as it does not come in collision with the recognized rules of society; speak courteously even of those you hate — even of Satan, if such a name should ever be uttered. For, to be agreeable to all, and to notice nothing till driven to do so is to make things agreeable for yourself, and, to live for self is the alpha and omega of existence. Now, it is not likely that such a state of being is ever going to arouse anyone to the eternal aspect of our existence. The world is not going to make things uncomfortable for itself, which it certainly would do if it shook you roughly and said: "Awake, thou that sleepest," for

your startled waking would be a condemnation of itself, — your opiate condemning the use of opiates.

And the same may be said of those grosser sins which are summed up under the general title "the flesh." As well expect the fire that smoulders and burns, and smoulders to burst out afresh; as well expect that to find voice and cry out to itself, "cease burning," as to expect these grosser sins to wake us to the evil they are working in us and the terrors they are moulding for us. Nay, the fire will burn, and eat out its way, and consume until it has burnt out all, and so these deadly sins left unrestrained, unfought against, will first lure, and then drive us like weary cattle to our death. Never need we hope that they will cease their furious onslaught, that they may wake us up to better things. Why should they? They exist to curse, not to bless. How? or why? would sin give benedictions? Nay, if the world would never wake us, tenfold surer is it that the flesh would never do so.

And is it likely the devil ever will? If ever pity or good feeling could have waked

for a passing moment in that awful being's breast, surely it would have been in "the savage wilderness," where the Lord of life and goodness met the tempter face to face. I doubt not that he simulated pity and that he stood before our Lord as a radiant angel of sweetest mercy, a divine messenger of help and strengthening, with heaven's light all about him, with music in his step and voice; but he was there to wreck the Godhead if he could. Oh! have you ever thought that if one spark of goodness lingered in that awful being's heart, it would have showed itself here, for here Satan himself might well have been tempted, — tempted not to tempt — tempted to fling himself and all his fallen beauty at his Saviour's feet and cry: "My Lord and my God." Do you think that that awful power that dared to face our Lord that he might lead him into sin, is going to rouse you out of the sleep of death in pity for your lost estate, and cry: Awake, thou that sleepest? Never. He who had the courage of his badness to tempt Christ, will never, never show you pity.

Hard lines these, you say,—the world, the

flesh and the devil banded to blight us; is it any wonder that from sheer despair of ever effecting anything, we should let sleep run its course and rest content with changeless darkness? Nay! the wonder is that so many of us are blind to what God has done for us to wake us, for the waking power is all about us, if we will but submit to it. Christ has come to wake us, and he will wake us if we will. We are not alone, nor are we by any means helpless. It is all folly and idle excusing to plead our weakness to contend and to resist to victory. Christ can pardon if we pray for pardon; he can start us on our new and better life; he can fill us with the Holy Spirit, making us quick to see sin and strong to resist it; he can open our eyes to see that our deadliest enemies are themselves vulnerable, if only we have Christ with us to fire our hearts and nerve our arm to resist them. There is no foe that seeks to destroy us that is greater in power than Christ, our friend, our Lord, our Saviour, who is with us, on our side, and ever near us. The world, the flesh and the devil is an awful trinity of evil; but there is a far greater Trinity of Good

on our side: Father, Son and Holy Ghost,—and even as in the end that blessed Trinity will subdue all things under its feet, so now it is able and willing to subdue all evil things within you, if you will these things to be subdued. But you must work with Christ, you must not awake when he wakes you, to steal back to sleep again, or strive and take secretly the old opiate that has been your curse and ruin. God demands honesty in those he seeks to help, and faith that will trust him and depend on his power. Give yourself with all your sins and your desires for a better life to God, and Christ will not only awake you for good, but he will shine steadily upon you: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee."

Those that sleep are for the time blind, and some of you are blind to Christ. You can see everything in your fevered dreams except Christ. Awake, put away your dreams, and fix your eyes and rest your hopes on Christ. If you desire to be what God would have you be, get Jesus Christ into your heart, your life, your hopes, and trust him and obey him,

and, before long, you will realize what our text means when it says, " Christ will shine upon thee."

EASTER.

Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subject all things to himself.

Phil. iii: 21.

What will we be hereafter?—a tremendous question that no one who has embraced Christianity as a living faith can well refrain from asking. For Christianity does not alone teach the immortality or deathlessness of the soul, thereby lifting man above all other creatures on the earth, but it claims an immortality of humanity; it never speaks of us as immortal angels, but as immortal men and women, — the outcome of death being an immortal soul associated with an immortal body.

Now, in our text, I think we have a very

beautiful light thrown on this subject, and I would ask your attention to its teaching.

First, St. Paul describes our position here, at this present moment, as Christians. "You, Philippians," he writes, "you glory in your Roman citizenship, in the fact that you cannot be imprisoned without a trial, or scourged, and that you have a personal right of appeal from any provincial tribunal to the Emperor himself at Rome. Well, we, Christians, have our citizenship too ; a long way from us as Rome is a long way from you, 'our citizenship is in Heaven,' from whence we wait for our emperor,—nay, more than emperor,—our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, this I take to be the position of all really Christian people. Our Divine Head has gone into heaven, and has carried our humanity thither, and has given us the freedom of the "City of God," and prepared a place for us there. Hence, in all my life here, I have a right to appeal straight to heaven, for, though not as yet within my city, I am of it, and I abide here, outside of it, using its privileges, until He who gave me my citizen ship calls me within the city itself. And, for

this call, I wait, patiently, dutifully, until Christ, my Saviour, calls, and I come.

As Christians we all believe this, we drink it all in ; it presents no stumbling block in the way of our faith, and yet what does it teach us? It teaches us what I think, as a rule, we almost systematically forget,— that whatever heaven is, or wherever heaven is, there is and has been for close on two thousand years, a Man, a human being, living and existing in it,—the risen Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought humanity into heaven, and hence my citizenship ; for He is the head of that vast body, the human host that no man can number and for whom the city is prepared. Hence, even as I live out my life here, claiming my citizenship, I stumble not at what may be done for me, because the thing is already done, — there is at this moment a Man in heaven.

Lest in any way you should doubt this, read the record of the days that followed the resurrection of our Lord. Remember how Jesus spoke to Mary, met the women, taught and explained Scripture on a country roadway, held out his hands to be handled, ate

the broiled fish and honeycomb, stood on the shore and told his disciples where to cast the net, rebuked and forgave Peter for his disloyalty, gave the great commission to his apostles, then led them out as far as Bethany and lifted up his hands to bless them, and as he blessed them ascended, — the risen Man, Christ, into heaven. Whatever He was, who, as man, did all these things, He is now in heaven as He was then on earth. He who ate the broiled fish and honeycomb, who looked with human eyes into Mary's eyes, who held out human hands to bless is in heaven. The thing is done; whatever barriers of apparent impossibilities had to be overleaped have been overleaped nearly two thousand years ago.

Notice what our text tells us as to our hereafter. "Christ," it says, "shall fashion anew "the body of our humiliation, that it may be "conformed to the body of his glory." This "body of our humiliation" is our present existing body,—that which to the human eye gives us individual personality. This body is to be fashioned anew, that is, the bodily form will be a new body; yet a new body that preserves my identity and individuality,

for it is to be conformed (that is, made like or similar) to the body of Christ's glory. Whilst our Lord, after his resurrection, was unquestionably the same Christ that died, so much so that Mary at once knew Him and others cried out, "it is the Lord," yet, it is plain that, physically, his body possessed powers which it never possessed before. The very act of his Ascension into heaven proves this, as well as his power of veiling for a time his personal identity, and appearing and disappearing. Well, as his body was, so is ours to be; it is to be made similar to His, "conformed" to His.

But more, it is to be made similar to that body glorified, to its state of glorified humanity. This, I think, is explained in that wondrous scene on the Mount of Transfiguration, where the form of our Lord was transfigured and glorified in the presence of his disciples.

But all the glory was not concentrated in Him. He was indeed at that moment a glorified man, but we must not forget the two men that talked with Jesus, — Moses and Elias. They also were glorified. They had long passed out of earthly life, but now brilliant and glorious even as He was, yet none

the less men, human beings glorified, for they spoke with Him of his decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. These were glorified men, men whose bodies of humiliation had been fashioned anew and conformed to the body of Christ's glory.

Again, notice what our text tells us as to how all this shall be brought about. "Our Lord himself shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, shall make it similar to his glorified body, — how? "according to the working," the power, the divine force and energy, "whereby He is able to subject all things to himself." Not one word as to the process, but the flinging us back on our faith in Christ's power. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible to us that God should raise the dead?" For man to do it of his own power, — impossible; for angel to do it, — impossible; but for God to do it, with whom "all things are possible," why should it be impossible?

But mark how the apostle looks at this power of Christ. He sees Satan surely bound, sin wiped out, the world regenerated, the curse removed, and all through Christ. He

sees the time when, from king on throne to the humblest child of God, holiness and purity, truth and justice shall live and rule, and all through Christ. He sees the Tabernacle of God with men, no more mourning, or trial, or pain, or tears, and no more death, and all through Christ. In a word, he sees everything brought into subjection through the power of Christ, under the rule of Christ, and as he sees this power working everywhere, and working triumphantly, he says: "In that "power which sweeps all before it that it "may establish all, lies the secret whereby "the body of our humiliation shall be fash-"ioned anew and made like unto Christ's "glorious body."

So, as all rivers run into the sea, here all perplexities, doubts, questionings, problems, apparent impossibilities run back into Christ. As our faith is strong and rooted in Him, so impossibilities become possible, tangled meshes of doubts and perplexities arrange themselves, the dark glass lights up with divine brilliancy, and as we look, we believe that "with God, with Christ, nothing is impossible."

I know not how this thought of perpetuated and glorified humanity strikes you, but to me it is a thought of inexpressible sweetness. To me there would be a living hell in the thought:

> "To thy dark chamber, mother earth, I come.
> Prepare my dreamless bed for my last home;
> Shut down the marble door,
> And leave me, let me sleep
> In death's eternal deep,
> Never to waken more."

No, not for me, thank God, nor for you, surely, can there can be joy in that. Life with all its ills is far too precious to come to that. I cling to a nobler poet, I draw sweetness out of grander words, and I rest all my hope on them.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand up at the last upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

EASTER.

He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.

Isaiah liii : 11.

This chapter is, I think, the most wonderful prophecy in the word of God, spoken at least seven hundred years before the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Its characteristic is photographic accuracy, tracking our Lord prospectively from birth to death, and making, as it were, a specialty of bringing out clearly the minutest points connected with the record of his earthly being. Step by step it follows Him to death and the grave. "He was cut off out of the land of the living," "He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." We see in the light of after history the body taken down from the cross—dead. We

see this lifeless body carried by faithful friends to the grave. We see it placed in the grave—the dead Christ. We see the great stone rolled to the grave's mouth, the seal of official authority placed on it; the guard of official authority set to watch the rock-hewn chamber and its dead, its silent tenant, and we go back to the old prophet and say, what is this? "He was cut off out of the land of the living," he replies, "He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." "Christ," he says, "is dead," and then with kindling eye, and voice full of magnificent triumph—clear as the trumpet note of advancing victory—he pours out his prophecy on dead man and on grave. "He is dead," he says, but death can never have dominion over Him. As a living mother sees her children's children round about her, so this dead man shall "see his seed." Nay, more—filled with the freshness of an immortal life, "He shall prolong his days, and in that new-born life He shall gather unto himself the threads of all God's providences for time and for eternity, "and the pleasure of the "Lord shall prosper in his hand." As a

mother coming back to conscious life finds new-born lips on which to print her kisses, so this dead man shall "see of the travail of his own soul," and "shall be satisfied." Nay, more, He shall justify you, He shall justify me, because He hath borne our iniquities. But never think that death has conquered the dead Christ. "He shall see his "seed, I tell you, He shall prolong his days, I "warn you, and the pleasure of the Lord shall "yet prosper in his hand."

Seven hundred years roll on and then come the life, and positive, actual death of Christ. If we had followed him, if we had hung round him like children, to meet our daily wants and guide us in our acts ; if, above all, we had not only learned to love Him, but that there had been steadily dawning on our minds the truth : "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God" ; if side by side with this there had risen in our hearts the trust that He was destined "to redeem Israel," and that all these hopes, and trusts, and faiths ended in the 'dead Christ," I wonder would we have borne it as lovingly as these simple-hearted men and women ?

Just fancy—to give up all to follow him who could no longer lead; to feel that he who raised Lazarus from the dead, was dead; to watch this "dawning God" lifted down from the cross—dead, as any common man might die; to feel as the dark night set in, that that which had been Christ was all alone in the silence of the new-made grave; to bear all this until the third day, and yet, to be able to talk of him with love and with some faint lingering hope that some way they might see him yet again. I wonder would we have borne all this?

"He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." When did He see it first in its new-born happiness? When Mary, quivering with joy, whilst tears ran down her face, bent before him in loving adoration and said "Rabboni." When, wooed and won by his loving teaching, the wayside travellers said: "Abide with us, for it is towards evening and the day is far spent," when their eyes were opened and they knew him, and He vanished out of their sight! When He stood in their midst and showed them his hands and feet, and their joy was so full that

they could scarce believe it true; when Thomas flung from him his gloomy doubts, and cast himself at his Saviour's feet and cried out in penitence, "My Lord and my God," and when the great pardoning words came to Peter, and the commission of his awful sin was blotted out, by the commission given him to preach salvation through that very Saviour whom three times he denied. He shall be "satisfied." Surely he found it here?

And when He gathered all his own about him, and for forty days rolled back the clouds of past and future, and pictured to them, no doubt, the Church of Christ, the ever growing, ever ripening, fruit of his sacred ministry, and when He led them out to Bethany, and fading from their vision in the clouds of heaven, saw every eye resting on Him, and every heart believing in Him and trusting in Him, and every soul burning with an unquenchable love that even death itself could not kill; and above all as He looked on a world placed in a position that it could be saved, every sin atoned for, if only every heart would believe it, surely He must then

have seen the travail of his soul, and have been satisfied.

Yes, for the time, but not the full satisfaction that has yet to come. To see a world made saveable must have brought joy, but to see a world saved, that is the fulness of joy.

One stands awed and stricken at the thought of what the death and resurrection of Christ will end in, at the consummation of all things. For, mark you, this cross of Christ and open grave is to tell on the whole world from its dawn to its sunset. The time will come when for every soul the one thought will be "Christ!" An awful "hush" will fall on every other thought of human mind, and Christ, and Christ alone, will be exalted in that day. It will come, sure as my death and your death will come, this beating of the Christly tide on every shore, this feeling of the Christly power for weal or woe in every heart. Kings on thrones shall bend before it, the stout-hearted and proud shall tremble under it, "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and Christ alone shall be exalted in that day." The message

scoffed at for millenniums will pass from lip to lip, and heart to heart. "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils," for the day of man is over and the day of Christ is come.

The world full of terror at the feet of Christ; and He the judge, just yet pitiful, ready to save my soul if I have given a cup of cold water in His name to the thirsty, ready to save me then if I cry unto Him and not unto the rocks, if I confess my sin, instead of my worldly blindness.

But the world for joy at the feet of Christ, real—unbounded, eternal joy—joy, like the joy of a giant harvest, the great Master coming home "bringing his sheaves with him," piled up, overflowing in his God-like arm. Or the joy of victory, the tramp of millions of millions; the song and shout of the redeemed as they press towards Him who saved them. Read this. Read it in the light of the life that you live. Read it in the light of your sorrows and cares, read it as you think of your dead and your loneliness. Above all read it when you think of the dead Christ, now, thank God, risen, never to die again:

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multi-

tude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen; blessing and glory and wisdom, and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.'"

Have we faith to believe all this, this Easter morning? Is it as real to us as to the old Hebrew prophet or the aged apostle blinded with the glory of the heavenly vision? Well may we pray "God make these things real to us" for not here, where travail and sorrow, are our lot, is satisfaction, but beyond, where Christ looks down on all that He has done, and as He looks, is satisfied.

EASTER.

Christ the first fruits. I Cor. xv : 23.
Christ in you the hope of glory. Col. i : 27.

It is freely acknowledged, I think, by all thoughtful persons that "no man liveth unto himself," that by word and example we each in some way are moulding others. Nay, that people cannot come into daily contact without exercising a subtle influence on each other tending towards either good or evil. Hence the somewhat modern, yet forcible expression which speaks of people "entering into our lives," it may be unconsciously, for this often takes place through the medium of a printed book, the author of which we have never spoken to or even seen.

Now there never has existed on earth a being that has so thoroughly entered into the lives of men as the Lord Jesus Christ. Not

merely into the lives of highly spiritual and godly persons, but positively into the lives of the utterly thoughtless, if not the flagrantly sinning. For our Lord has not only given his followers a life to live, but the demands of that life are so powerful that they exercise an influence on those who positively refuse to be his disciples. What is it that gives the irreligious wife, living in most Christian countries, perfect calmness of mind with regard to the perpetuity and sacredness of the marriage vow? Christ. What is that wide-spread influence, which, underlying all civilization, says to you and to me, as we tend towards crime, "Thus far thou shalt go and no farther?" Surely the influence of Christ. Whence comes that spirit of justice, which like a shield held over a defenceless form, claims that every one should be accounted innocent until proved to be guilty? Surely from Christ, whose imperishable words have floated down the centuries to mould the civilized teaching of all time, "If I have spoken evil bear witness of the evil; if well why smitest thou me.?" Ah, my friends, you may refuse to follow

Christ, you may fancy that you are fashioning your life altogether on your own lines, you may even take your defiant stand on the bare, bald platform of practical atheism, and yet at every crucial turning-point of your home, your social, and your concentrated life, you owe a debt of gratitude to Jesus Christ. Every permanent public or social blessing you enjoy, has, in some sense, His stamp upon it, and hence, if for none other reason than this, one should consider whether in degrading Christ he is not laying the axe at the root of his own liberties.

But Christ has done more than enter into our lives, He has revolutionized our ideas of life. Before Christ, it is true, widespread man had a vague, misty yet real idea of the perpetuation of the life beyond death, but its very vagueness in countless cases only added sorrow to tears. There was nothing so intensely real as the awful grave, or funeral fires—no vagueness about them. "To them," the ancients cried, "we bring our dead, to them we give them, with them we leave them; out beyond is all cloudland, darkness, uncertainty—something is there; yet, ah,

who can tell?" This was the popular belief of the millions; oh, think of hearts all full of affection feeding on food like this, and even this, vague, yet not hopeless belief eaten into, undermined by scoff of polished orator, and sneer of caustic philosopher, who caught the public ear through poetry, and laughed belief out of the minds of the masses through catching lines like these:

> "The silent realms of disembodied ghosts,
> The frogs that croak along the Stygian coasts,
> The thousand souls in one crazed vessel steered,
> No boy believes, save boy without a beard."

It was in a world like this, in the face of gloom and unbelief like this that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, without taint of death, or poison of corruption; without change of form or change of voice; without loss of memory or weakening of love, and facing the world steeped in darkness, doubt or despair proclaimed to the sons of men, that greater than any earthly power was the power of resurrection, and stronger than any form of death was life eternal. It was a practical revolution changing everything. It was as if vast stretches of Arctic regions locked up in

eternal snows and ice, suddenly blossomed and bloomed into the flowers and verdure of an eternal spring. Man no longer groped for the light, for that shone in on him with such lavish bounty that it seemed to blind him as he gazed. It was not that Christ rose from the dead, and that there was hope that others would rise, but it was the certainty that as Christ rose, so would all rise. That there was no power in death to wither identity, to paralyse love forever, to seal up lips eternally, to blind eyes in whose light of love we had lived from childhood, and to wipe out all that makes me myself, or you to me, living, and each one to his own, loving personalities. It was this that made the resurrection the tremendous power it was, in a world where death had literally reigned, where the highest conception beyond the grave of the dearest one ever loved would have been that of a mist-like spirit that might remind me of the past, but that shrank from my touch and faded from my sight, as memory grew stronger and my love revived. Such a vision might not be death, but it would be a vision all stained by death, all tainted by its

reality, a vision of what once was the dearest thing to me, but with all that made it dear, forever dead. And hence it came to pass that of all the joyful surprises that man has ever passed through, of all that ever he grasped at with grateful heart, there never was a surprise of joy, like the surprise of the resurrection. And as the risen form of the dear master entered into the room where the disciples were sitting, and moved amongst them, the same Jesus that had died, the whole world seemed to spring into a new life, because the sting was taken out of death, and that awful grave that for millenniums had seemed a pit of degradation, became a garden in which the grateful living planted flowers of spring, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. One has to realize this as St. Paul stood with his back turned on the blackness and darkness of the old heathen horrors of the past, and the joyful light of the resurrection shining on his face, and as we listen to his shout of Christly triumph, "Oh, death! where is thy sting; Oh, grave where is thy victory?" Death is there, but its sting is gone; the grave is there,

but thanks be to God, even for the body, each grave will become the cradle of a new-born and unending life.

To prove to you the power with which Christ in resurrection has entered into our lives, fancy our leaving this church to-day with the unshaken certainty that our dead are and forever will be dead and that the resurrection was a lovely dream. To watch and tend and wait and pray ; to count, the last, by weeks, by days, by hours, till finally, the last itselfhas come, and never again will that eye meet my own, or that hand press my own, or that voice which at the very last told me of its love, be heard again forever. Never, never forever. I know a more happy picture far than this. There is a garden and within the garden a sepulchre, and there standing in the grey dawn of morning, full of manly strength and beauty is Jesus who was crucified on Calvary ; the same Jesus, who now bending over Mary calls her by her name, and says, " Go tell my disciples that I am risen from the dead."

EASTER.

Now when Jesus was risen early on the first day of the week. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven devils.

Mark xvi. : 9.

The "Mary" mentioned in our text furnishes one of the clearest evidences we could ask for as to the will and power of Christ to forgive sin. If the evidence of sin forgiven is a life clinging to Christ, a gradual new creation of character that advancing in growth may be plainly seen through all its strugglings, then Mary Magdalene is one of the clearest cases of such forgiveness that we have in the Word of God.

We possess two sources of information concerning her—one inspired, the other traditional—possibly malignantly so.

The inspired record brings her before us, leaving much to the natural imagination of

the mind. She may, or she may not have been that lonely outcast, who, filled with womanly remorse, for womanly loss, entered the house of the scrupulous Simon, and bending in a paroxysm of penitence at our Saviour's feet, washed them with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. The weight of Scriptural evidence, would I think, favour this view, but the point is reasonably debateable. There is no debate, however, about the horrifying fact that she had been, before Jesus healed her, a devil-possessed woman. God knows it is awful enough to read the record of the devil-possessed men of Gadara—raging terrors, feared and hated by men, as Mary, no doubt was feared and hated by women.

The second source of information is that strange and giant mass of literature known as the Jewish Talmud which speaks of a Mary of Magdala, exquisite in form and bewitching beauty, who, careless of every womanly instinct, lived such a life of wild recklessness as to gain her name a place in that volume of Jewish writings. There is no doubt that some have used this Mary to

fling scorn on Christianity, just as the Scribes assailed the purity of Christ himself on the plea that, "he receiveth sinners and eateth with them. Whatever the circumstances were, however, one thing is certain, that Mary was spiritually lost till Jesus met her. Sinful, outcast, hopeless, degraded, no help for her but in the God of whom she knew nothing. So the unknown, unsought for God came to her, and God saved her.

Her after history is one of ceaseless attendance on the ministry of Jesus, of clinging close to the little band who clung to Him, of cleaving to the side of a purer Mary—our Lord's dear mother—who seems to have taken her as a sister or daughter to her heart. But the stain of shame, though taken off her soul, seems to have lingered round her name to the last. She was "Mary out of whom went seven devils," or it may be "Mary the Magdalene," if so, the saddest name of all.

The very sunshine brings the shadow, and so the very joy of Jesus brings at times its gloom. As for poor Mary with her awful record behind her, what if He who held her fast to good should leave her? What if her

stay and prop on whom she trusted should be taken? What power then could keep her from going down the old dark road of the dreadful past, from that awful "empty room," so easily "swept and garnished." Is it any wonder that Mary clung to Christ, and that the one misery of that woman's life was, the thought that Christ would leave her. As long as He was near, she was safe, she feared nothing, but, Oh! God help her if Jesus left her!

Well, Jesus dies; Jesus is buried, and Mary has no hope of his resurrection. True to the last, she had kept close to the cross, through all his agony of dying; and foremost amongst the women she had entered the garden, and watched all that had saved her, all that had brought light into her darkness, placed in the tomb. Far worse in misery often, than even the day of death, are those hours of the day that follow burial, those awful objectless hours; before the foot has wholly lost the muffled step of death, or the voice regained its tones and flung off its hush. When the living seem to have no joy for us and we care not to speak of the dead, and welcome night

that we may be alone. Those hours scattered the band. Some are walking in gloomy knots; Thomas has started out alone, whilst others, like frightened cattle in a storm, herd within the upper room, for not one is really sure that Christ will rise.

Even Mary—grand heart of faith and love—even Mary did not believe it. Mary, one might ask, what are you carrying to the grave on the Easter morning? Spices. What for, Mary? To embalm the dead body of my Lord; He cast seven devils out of me; He saved me; He made me what I am, "and now, he is dead." That was unbelief you say, yes, the unbelief of love. Such unbelief, believe me, as God smiles on. A lesson to the stern and hard-judging, prepared always with their verdict of guilty, who, if they had their way, would hound down Mary as a sceptic, and Thomas as something worse.

And now the grave is rent, Easter has dawned on Calvary, the Spirit of the Lord with the fragrance of Paradise on it, has returned to the silent body, and Jesus wakes to earthly life again. To whom shall He seek to reveal himself first? O brethren, the

whole story of the Gospel is crowned and glorified with the sacred words, "He appeared first to Mary Magdalene out of whom he cast seven devils." That is, the desire and will of his returning soul was to seek her first; others met Him, but He rose and left the grave to seek her.

Why to Mary? Because she needed Him most. In one sense, she was the weakest; in one sense she was the most dependent on Him; in one sense the memory of the past was more likely to crush her than others. Therefore, He would not suffer her to mourn one moment longer than was needed. Her ear should catch the first sound of his Easter voice, for she was amongst the very worst He ever saved, and never could He speak too soon to lift the clouds, and fill her faithful heart with joy.

It would have been an exquisite act of loving manhood, if Jesus had appeared first to his mother, and had said, "Mother, behold thy son." But such an appearance would have been as nothing compared to this act of divinely instinctive thoughtfulness. Christ came to save sinners, He was born for that,

and here was, perhaps, the worst sinner He ever saved. If a Mary has to be spoken to, the claims of the once outcast Mary outweigh the claims of the Holy Mary, for "Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And so Christ seeks her first before mother, or Peter, or John, or James, that to her dying hour she might remember, "He died to save me; and rising, sought me to strengthen me."

And this is the happy Easter message that I would wish to leave upon our souls to-day. I would say to the weakest, take heart, be of good courage, Christ is on your side, He seeks you out first that He may bless you. The very sins and wasted hours that you mourn over, the very dread you have lest you should fall or wander backward, your very weakness and fear of self —these are the very reasons why, through the pleadings of his spirit, He seeks you out first, to build you up and strengthen you. He does not come with angry voice to lay your weakness bare. He did not ask Mary why she brought the spices—O wondrous touch of God-like love—he seemed as though

he saw them not or knew that they were, he only called her by the old, loved name, "Mary," associated with the gentlest and holiest memories of the past. And so this very Easter day, he desires to seek you out and find you, as if he knew your very name, as he surely does ; speaking as a dear friend rather than your risen God, that he might build you up and strengthen you.

And what a lesson this first appearance teaches us as to our judgment of others ! Mary was caught, as it were, red-handed, in the very act of unbelief, the evidence of her faithlessness scented the clear air of the Easter morning—those awful accusing spices, testifying to the full that she believed that death had conquered. Here was a pure, holy, Christ-devoted life, when suddenly this one blot appears upon it—one branch of the tree seared as if by lightnings and all else fruitful. Why not cut it down ? Better to leave it to Christ : He knows how to deal with it. Hushed be your judgment ; listen to Him. All that he does to the criminal is, to call her by her name, Mary. For this is Easter morning and the very air is full of love.

EASTER.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also.

St. John xiv : 3.

The whole religious question between materialism and Christianity, resolves itself into the all important one, as to whether man after death, will have a fresh start in life, or not ? Materialism definitely and distinctly says "No." Christianity definitely and distinctly says, "Yes;" and the conflict of opinion is so marked and decisive, that compromise of any shape or form is an utter impossibility. The fact is that each system regards man, not only from different standpoints, but as a different kind of being.

Materialism regards man as essentially of the earth, earthy; there is nothing in him that chemistry and other sciences cannot

reasonably account for. One thing is certain, he is a chemical compound acted on by forces outside of himself; and when he dies the machine is irreparably broken, the clock stops and the key is lost; the stream dries up, never to run again. As to his virtues and vices, his loves and affections, his laughter and tears, his contraction and sweep of intellect,—well, all these things can be chemically, physiologically, or otherwise accounted for. In any case, they all stop—stop once and forever, and all that remains of the fondest father, the truest husband, the noblest statesman, the most brilliant scholar; of the apostle who died for Christ, nay, of Christ himself, is some lime and phosphorus, some iron, sulphur and magnesia; and then in course of time discernible as individual not one single thing; the whole man, bodily, spiritually, mentally, is as clean wiped out as if he never existed. Hence, materialism, in whose eyes affection is of little worth, would treat all human bodies as of a fixed, marketable value, and I must say does so consistently. For if in life, man is but a machine, and if after death his cremated ashes

are positively worth money, the total outcome of death worth, we are told, millions of money, why should not man's remains be used to enrich the soil as phosphates are used, and thus give back large returns at compound interest for the deposit made. God help us, a more dark, revolting and hopeless creed could never, under any possibility, have emanated from the mind of man.

Now, Christianity, or Christ, regards man as a totally different kind of being. There is no common ground between Christ and the materialist, they are hopelessly at variance.

Christ regards man as a being possessed of a body, phosphorus, lime, &c., no doubt, but within there is a deathless or immortal soul, something beyond all chemical analysis, and that soul is the man; his individuality and personality are centred there, not in the body, and hence man is an immortal, deathless being, clothed upon with a human body.

The body is not immortal, nay, it is formed to undergo physical changes that finally end in death, but according to Christ, when death strikes, its blow is confined to the body, and with the death of the body, as a like-

timed act, comes the positive release of the soul, which leaves the body, under the law of immortality, just as a man may in the morning leave his house.

Nay, more ; so hopelessly is Christ at variance with the materialist, that He follows the flight of the soul out of the body, follows it as an individual personality, in one well-known case follows the individual soul by its earthly name, whilst the dead body which lately held it lay cold and swathed within a tomb at whose door our Lord was standing. The body was not Lazarus –Lazarus was gone to another place —into which Christ called. Admitting the truth of the record, is there not wondrous teaching in the dead body, in the living Christ standing near it, and in His voice, ringing out from the earth into the unseen world, where the soul of Lazarus was, the words "Lazarus, come forth." It means, Soul of Lazarus come back into your dead body ; leave where you are and return to earth. And then, the awful silence of expectation ; and then, the movement in the tomb ; and then, the living Lazarus groping his way

towards Him who called him back to life. If this be true, compromise between Christ and materialism is as impossible as union between fire and water.

But more. Christ not only teaches that the soul of man is a distinct entity, capable of living apart from the body ; but that in due time it will be clothed upon again with a body ; and that the whole man, having passed the bounds of death, will obtain a fresh start in bodily life—which life will be immortal, deathless and unending, in other words, the new body will be deathless.

And this fresh start, according to Christ, is connected with the individual soul that once inhabited the old earth and death-stricken body. Whatever the greater gifts of the immortal body may be, whatever the enlargement of its powers, however elevated and refined its intellectual and spiritual perceptions, none of these things will interfere with the personality and sharp cut definition of of the original individual that "was bodily dead"; and like his Master is alive again. According to Christ, I will die bodily, I will live again bodily ; not something

like that which was "myself," but "I myself" will live again, and this I know on the practical testimony of the Lord, who died as the man Jesus, and who was the first fruits of our resurrection, "the first fruits of them that sleep."

Such is the radical difference between materialism and Christ, a void that nothing can fill save the utter destruction and burial of one of the contending parties. One, cold, icy hopelessness; the other, for those fitted to absorb it, joy, and brightness, and gladness—the glorious joy of deathless, unending life, victory and triumph everywhere; as the glad cry of gratitude goes up to God, "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"

Now look at direct Christly teaching on this subject. He has come up to death; He feels its chill before it strikes, as we so often feel it; and he suffers what the best and purest of us suffer from, the sorrow and sadness of prospective parting. For realize that, though God, He was perfect man, and just as when death slowly yet sensibly draws near to us, and that dear ones and things seem nearer to us than ever, so it was with Him.

But He had what we find it so hard to grasp with realistic certainty—He had clear, unblemished views with regard to the reality of that life which lies out beyond death. Here, everything was as clear, as the fact of coming death was clear; one was just as sure and certain as the other. He would die bodily, that was sure, and He would live again bodily, that was sure; and the fresh start in bodily life to Him would open out before him, joy unspeakable. In the new-born future, that death could never touch, was his harvest, the harvest of his present life so soon to be ended; the gathering-in to himself of all he lived for, of all he was about to die for. Outside of this life, outside of death, the great joyous satisfaction that would atone for the travail of his soul and give "the Man of Sorrows" eternal happiness.

See how real to Him the future life was, and how real to Him for those from whom He was about to be parted.

You need nothing more than to realize that in speaking, He was speaking of his death, and then to take the bare words just as He spoke them and let them speak for themselves.

"And if I die, I will come again, and take you to myself, that where I am ye may be also."

First, the individuality is perfect. Death will not kill the Christ, "I will come again." Neither will death annihilate the disciples; I will come for you, one by one I will come for you. As death is sure, so will I be sure, He will never come to you alone, I will come with him.

Then see the certainty of re-union for the blessed dead. I will come again and take you unto myself, we will be together again, Saviour and disciples. All that is now so horrible in prospect, will lie behind us, we will walk in the light together. And notice the joy and glory. Whatever his glory and joy will, in a measure, be ours, for He will come not only to take us unto Himself, but to keep us to Himself, so that wherever He is there will we be. "I will not leave you orphans," he says, "I will come to you," come to renew, to bind closer together all our old loves and affections; and to keep them together in the eternities—throughout the eternities—never to be separated.

Now this is Christianity, Christly teaching. Its marvel is, the exalted view it gives me of my own being, how it enlarges the scope of my individuality, and makes one feel in his better and more spiritual moments the rush of eternal blood, and the beatings of an immortal life.

And marvellous is it, how it reduces in terror and power, the one terror and one power that hangs over the mind of many, the power of death. There may be a gospel in materialism for the bad, vile man—heartless and cruel, who has made his life a curse to himself, a gospel in the thought that with death ends his hated life, and the memories and miseries that he himself has created. But for the pure and holy, even for the weak and tempted, yet battling, there is something abhorrent in the thought that death ends everything. Why, the mere loves of our life shriek out against it as positively infamous. Made to love, made to die; that in our death loves may be quenched in a torrent of tears, or dragged to pieces day by day, month by month, with a refinement of cruelty that amounts to torture, Oh! God help us, what

could be more awful than this? This weight of woe, and then—nothing.

Nay, says Christ, all that is as abhorrent to God as it is to you, Death to the holy is not destruction, but a door—a door out of darkness into daylight, out of the childhood of life into its full eternal activities. "You will never know what life is, never realize its powers and possibilities, never taste of the fullness of its joys, till you lie down to sleep with me in death, and awake with me in Paradise."

Now we can understand what Christ meant, when he said, "follow me." He, immortal, came to us immortal, to make our immortality a blessed thing. He died to save us, He lives to help, and He will come again to take us to himself if only we are faithful. Believe in Him, love Him, trust Him, cast all on Him, and the time will come—God only knows how soon for some of us—when our eyes will open on a glorious life that knows no death and we will be with Christ forever.

EASTER.

And Thomas said unto them, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

St. John xx : 25.

The position taken by St. Thomas with regard to the resurrection of our Lord is by no means an uncommon one in the present day, with reference to other questions. He was asked to believe a fact having a strong bearing on the religious side of life, and he refused to believe it apart from demonstrative evidence of the plainest kind. "Seeing," he argued, "tends towards believing, but short of touch, even seeing is untrustworthy. The most perfect circumstantial evidence, nay, for the matter of that, direct evidence, is liable to deceive, intentionally or unintentionally;

but when with clear, cool, cautious brain at work, I see a dead man walk, and touch what I see, I cannot possibly be deceived. Therefore, I must not only see my Lord, but I must touch my Lord, before I can believe that he is risen from the dead."

Now, this position taken by St. Thomas arose, I have no doubt, from the strong belief in ghosts or spirits prevalent at that time, and held by the disciples, as well as the public generally. Thus when our Lord walked on the water his disciples thought "they saw a spirit," and when St. Peter was released from prison they at once jumped at the conclusion that his "supposed bodily presence" was nothing more than a spectral appearance. Indeed, the majority of them, if not all, appeared to believe in the "ghost theory" as explanatory of our Lord's resurrection, for St. Luke tells us that when our Lord appeared to them "they were terrified and supposed they had seen a spirit," until our Lord, unasked, gave them the very proof that St. Thomas demanded, namely, "touch" as well as sight.

Now, if this be the method whereby St. Thomas accounted for the appearance of our

Lord after death, then we are brought face to face with a strange, yet at the same time very common fact in connection with almost all forms of scepticism. St. Thomas will not believe that Christ could be raised from the dead, but he will believe, and argue on his belief, that the ghost of Christ could appear. He will not believe in Christ with real eyes full of the old earth love, and real hands capable of magnetic touches that seem to endow the touch with speech,—he will not believe that, but he will believe in a seeming hand, in apparent eyes that are delusions, in a voice that comes, apart from any organization formed to create and give effect to articulated sound. He said, "I have no doubt you saw, what seemed to be the risen Lord, but you did not touch what you saw and the test lies in touch. Now, if I ever see what you saw, I will touch and that not gently, but roughly; I will thrust my hand into the side, and if the side resists, then certainly it is my risen Lord, if not, then it is his ghost." Now the strange thing here is that St. Thomas would not believe in the resurrection of our Lord, no doubt on account of the apparent physical

difficulties that lay in its way, but he would admit the existence of a ghostly appearance, although he had never seen a ghost, or any of the disciples, and spite of the countless physical difficulties that appear to invest the whole field of such mysterious appearances.

Well, this strange, paradoxical aspect of mind is by no means exceptional ; in fact it is a very common thing for people to refuse to believe in any "one thing," because it is unlikely, improbable, or impossible, and yet, to explain "the thing" by a method of their own, which involves just as great an amount of improbability.

Up to, say, thirty years ago, it was generally conceded that the heavenly bodies, sun, moon and stars; the organs of the human body, eyes, hands and feet, the mind of man, or the brain, the organ of the mind, were designed by God to be what they are. Now, it is largely the fashion amongst a very influential school of thinkers to assert that nothing that is was ever intended to be exactly what it is. Laws either always were, or came into action (how they say not), and these laws without guidance or object, gave us the world of beauty and order that we exist in.

Now such a mind rejects the idea of God's design and purpose, either on account of its supernatural aspect or on account of the indignity done to God by supposing that He would condescend to frame and fashion anything, and yet that same mind can believe that "endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful," and countless systems of suns and stars and planets, have all arrived at their respective standards of well-balanced order, apart from mind and intention, and purpose altogether. That the eye was not intended or made to see, or hand made to grasp, or foot made to support, or brain formed to think. That it might have happened altogether otherwise, that very slight accidental variations in the dim distant ages behind man might have peopled this world with a race of blind, speechless and deformed idiots. Now surely here you have St. Thomas repeated. Your modern Thomas will not believe in a Creator working with a plan or object; but he will believe in a succession of unforeseen, unplanned contingencies, resulting in all the beauty and symmetry and perfection and method that the noblest de-

signer might well rejoice in, as the fruit and outcome of his labours.

Or take another case very common.

Christianity is more than a religious organization. It is a spiritual life, a mysterious union between God and man, in which the unseen part of the union—the God—operates on the life and hopes of the seen part—the man. Now there are many who believe in the organization and identify themselves with it, who personally shrink back from a free and open confession of their belief and trust in the personal divine life of the institution. "It is so mysterious," they say, "so past comprehension," "so altogether outside of the powers of our mind," &c. And yet such people are willing to admit that Christianity which is in its nature wholly opposed to the natural tastes and desires of man, has been and is, the greatest moral force on the face of the earth. What nauseous medicine is to the child, what salt is to the thirsty, what purity is to the sensualist, this Christianity is naturally to every soul born into the world, and yet it sweeps the world, its net is always well filled. How like St.

Thomas! I cannot believe that God, the Holy Ghost, directs, warns and strengthens me individually, but I can, I do believe, that a religious system, wholly opposed to my nature, governs and rules by the inherent power of its organized force, the very nature of godless man!

Again, there are not a few who shrink from wiping the Lord Jesus out of their minds as an object of veneration, yet who cannot regard him as God. They would strip him of miracles, mystery, atoning death on the cross, resurrection from the grave and ascension into heaven. They cannot believe in a Christ who proved his divine mission by these things, but they can believe in a Christ who revolutionized the world for good without them. They can make Christ a good, holy, yet uneducated and common man, and yet believe that this holy yet weak being not only wiped out the rooted heathenism of Greece and Rome, but erected on its ashes a Christian system, based on the belief that this lonely man (who according to them never did anything wonderful) was God.

Brethren, there is no question that the great

characteristic of modern scepticism is an unlimited capacity for the reception of the marvellous. For scepticism is, as a rule, a revolt against the supernatural, but the revolutionist moving in a circle, comes back to the spot from whence he started, a supernaturalist still. He rejects a God Christ, but believes in a man Christ, with the power of a God. He rejects a world intentionally perfected, but believes in a world magnificently perfected through accident. In a word, like St. Thomas, he rejects the resurrection from the dead but firmly believes in ghosts.

Well, it is a happy thought that the degradation of the risen Christ does not interfere with the loving Christ. Spite of St. Thomas's doubt, St. Thomas was loved, and if tradition be true, he died as a martyr preaching the resurrection which once he doubted. And so for every doubting one the Lord Jesus is ever speaking in some way, "Feel me, touch me, know that I am He." O happy he, who like St. Thomas touches not, though lured to do so, but bends in holy adoration at the feet of Him who gives the test and says, "My Lord and my God."

Again, do not think to get rid of the supernatural; if you do not receive it in one shape you must in another. In the great desert world of Africa, you may foolishly go on covering up the tracks of the lion, wiping them out in the yellow sand, but clearing away the tracks does not kill the lion ever capable of leaving footprints quicker than you can wipe them out. So the great philosopher of the present has done his best to wipe out all tracks of a personal God in creation, in morality, in life, in death; but even he is forced at last to lead the enquirer up to a curtain beyond which his reason cannot penetrate, and to say, "Behind that is the unknowable." Just as I say of prayer, or word, or holy feast, or baptism, "Behind that is God." No, the hardest thing to escape from is the presence of God. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence."

WHITSUNDAY.

The Holy Ghost.

Acts ii: 4.

There are four great events that have left their broad marks upon the commemorating instinct of the older churches; the birth of Christ, Christmas; the death of Christ, Good-Friday; the resurrection of Christ, Easter, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecostal church, Whit-Sunday. As all these events are equally important in connection with the divine plan of man's redemption the church has treated each with like reverence; in its eyes Whit-Sunday being just as important a commemoration as Christmas, Good-Friday or Easter.

Yet strange to say the church as a worshipping body—certainly in the present age—in no sense regards Whit-Sunday with the

same spirit of chastened devotion, of earnest attention, which it naturally renders to Christmas or Easter. This may in part be accounted for by the singularly sweet and touching earthly associations which long centuries of time have evolved out of the divine facts which Christmas and Easter commemorate. Christ was born to save the family of man, young and old, rich and poor, and hence, the family thought which makes Christmas so beautiful, the gathering together of parents and parted children, the joy of childhood, and so on, and, hence also, the spirit of Christmas generosity and benevolence, which fills the empty pocket and spreads the empty table of the poor household whom Christ Jesus came to save. And in the same way Easter touches the human heart, where, as a rule, its tenderest memories and softest feelings are lodged. It makes even death beautiful, it flings a light from beyond down the death valley that our dearest and best loved have passed through and it tells us that the light will be there when we are called to follow in their footsteps.

And in connection with Good-Friday the

same personal kind of influence is present. We may not enter mentally or spiritually into the deep mysteries of the death of Christ, but we grasp with joy the powerful thought, "He died for me to save me from my sins, He "died for mine." It is my cross, my children's cross, and He who lies on it is my Saviour and theirs.

But the evolution of public thought in connection with the Holy Spirit and Whit Sunday has taken a somewhat different form, and naturally so. We have no human personality all full of human love and human life present with us, one who speaks, who pities, who with a touch heals the sick, and with a word calls back the dead. Nothing of this nature, but tongue-like flames of fire, mystic gifts of speech, a crowd of strangely influenced people, and then an unseen, yet all powerful influence softening hearts, restraining wayward wills, setting in motion new-born desires of purity and holiness, and changing lives from evil to good as if God himself had entered into them. All this is as truly personal to us as the cross of Christ or the cradle at Bethlehem ; but then, there is no

cradle, no infant, no rugged cross with bleeding form, and "face marred more than any man's," lying on it. It is all divine, all supernatural—all outside of our reasoning and intellect, even as God himself is; there is nothing human in it, save where the divine operates on the human, on a crowd at Pentecost, on Saul as he journies to Damascus, on you, on me, as we journey hither and thither as life leads us. No voice, no form to meet or follow with eye, but the divine influence of an unseen being as truly divine as He who sent the Son to die, or as the Son himself who came.

And yet the Spirit's work is as needed as that of the Lord Jesus when he lay on the cross, and is as personal as that of the Lord Jesus when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. It seems a strange thing to say, but it is a strictly scriptural deduction, that lack of the Spirit's work would neutralize the power of the cross, even as lack of the cross would neutralize the work of the Spirit, for if the former places us in a position of Salvation—makes salvation possible for us—the latter is the power, the agency, the divine in-

fluence which brings Christ into our lives, and develops that "holiness without which "no man can see the Lord." All that we naturally group together under the words "goodness," "holiness," "piety;" all that we understand by such words and terms as "virtue," "victory over sin," "contest with sin;" all that we mean when we speak of "faith," "hope," "love;" all these things as characteristic in any shape or any form of our lives are the direct result of God's holy spirit working in us to will and to do the good pleasure of God. And that divine work is as personal toward me as if the Holy Spirit in human form said "do this," or with voice of power commanded me to refrain from doing it.

For every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.

We only fail to localize the distinct acts of the Holy Spirit through looking in the wrong place for them. In the life of our blessed Lord the human character of his actions made everything for us personally real, even places and things. We can call up before us,

mentally, the blue waters of the lake, the storm sweeping down through the mountain ravines, the boat in danger, the cry of the disciples, and the solemn figure of Him who rules the storm and speaks the ruling words. We seem to see it all, and above all Him, as indeed we could have seen Him if our day had run side by side with his. Thus we know the lake, and we seem to know as surely the well of Jacob, or the pool of Bethesda, or the awful garden with its dark shades, within which he in sorrow prayed. He in the reality of his personal humanity has made these things to us as household scenes; but all this, as I said is lacking in connection with the Holy Spirit save where, as a dove, he lighted on our Saviour's head; or as tongues of fire made Pentecost for ever immortal.

Now, thoughts such as these are all wrong, because you look in the wrong place for evidences of the Spirit's power and being. He works not as the Saviour, a living form amongst living men; He works on hearts, on feelings and passions, on tastes and desires, on hopes and fears—on those hidden elements

which, taken together, make what we call the "soul"—that which in the highest sense is "me." The difference between the earth work of Christ and the earth work of the Spirit, is that in the case of Christ we see the Workman; whereas in the case of the Spirit we possess the work. All that is permanently good in me is the Spirit's influence for good. We have not far to go to look for Him if we love and trust the Saviour, if we seek to lead a life pleasing to Him, if we value prayer, and feel in any sense which is real "Christ in us the hope of glory." We have not to go outside of ourselves, for every one of these faiths and feelings and emotions are as directly the work of God the Holy Spirit on ourselves, as the great act of atonement was the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Indeed, there is never a moment of decision between good and evil in my life—a decisive moment in which from love of Christ and good I select the good, that such a decision in the strife which ever exists between human and divine wills—is not a victory won in me and preserved for me by God the Holy Spirit, for never would I have made the

choice of good, if the Spirit had not helped me in the strife of choosing.

There is more for you, for me, in the great gifts that Heaven has poured down on us than even the love of God, or the cross of Christ—more. Great as is the mystery of that divine and unequalled love which gave me a Saviour to die for my sins, it is not greater than that love which is ever with me in the strife of my soul, in the trials of my life; in the tears of my journey as well as in the joys of my existence; that which is ever with me for good, which like my shadow is now before me, now behind me, but alway close to me; that which if I only follow as it leads, or answer as it calls, will ever lead me into truth; and that which guides my steps, and blesses my existence for grace and good, and never leaves me whilst hope of good remains; that power is God the Holy Ghost.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

How can these things be?

St. John iii: 9.

The tendency of the present age is largely to prize human knowledge above personal holiness and goodness, and to place outside the bounds of usefulness or worth all that does not come within the power of man's intellect and understanding. Of course, this has always been so in varying degrees, and hence there have always existed two schools of thought in the world; one school investigating, analysing, searching and seeking to arrive at the causes of things, and the other, believing as acts of faith in many things, which it claims pass human understanding altogether. The former school has ever given a strong and powerful impetus to all kinds of "investigation," has laid open long locked

secrets of nature, and has done much for the intellectual education of man ; the second school has been the outcome and the fosterer of all forms of religious belief; and has developed the spiritual side of man's being. Really, there is no necessary antagonism between these schools of thought. The Investigator is perfectly justified in seeking the reasons which underlie natural phenomena, and the religious student perfectly justified in believing that there are many things connected with man and life the world and the universe, wholly beyond his intellectual grasp. The antagonism comes in where one school tries to crush out the life of the other—a perfectly unjustifiable position —for the simple reason that the desire to know what can be known, and the desire to believe and show faith and trust in a supernatural power are each alike, part and parcel of the nature of man. One of these days some great mind will define the limits of both schools, and preach a new gospel of friendship and alliance between them.

Now, it has ever seemed to me that religion must always be connected with mys-

teries that lie beyond our highest knowledge. The adoration, reverence, homage, veneration due to a Divine Being, arises largely in our present state from imperfect knowledge; hereafter, no doubt, it will arise from the perfection of knowledge. The more we know, the more we will adore. But constituted as we are, we could never bow down and adore the total of a column of figures, or the engines that move a gigantic system of machinery, or the telescope that sweeps vast areas of the heavens, or the microscope that discloses the hidden beauty of things infinitesimal. Why not? Because we are master of the column of figures, we are more than its equal. We understand perfectly the engines and machinery combined, and we can take the telescope or microscope to pieces, and put them together again. We admire these things, but we would never go down on our knees and adore them.

Now, my friends, if you and I knew everything about God; if we could understand his providences as we do a column of figures; if we could know the ins and outs of his dealings with the children of men, as we know

the workings of machinery; if we could take his work to pieces and put it together again—well, we would admire God, and possibly honour Him, but we would never adore Him, worship Him with prayer and praise and thanksgiving, and depend on Him for every blessing that we need as his children. The fact is, that under such conditions we would be equal with God, and in some cases more than his equal. And yet this is what so many crave and thirst for, regarding mysteries and lack of knowledge as inconsistent with the light of the Gospel, and demanding that no doctrine of scripture should go below the water-mark of human reason, but that all should be as simple as the alphabet or a common rule of grammar. Of course the ultimate result of such simplicity would be, that God would become simply unnatural, and that the idea of a Divine Being, the creator and sustainer of all things would perish.

Now, apply these thoughts to a doctrine naturally before us at this season of the Christian year—the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Men often speak of this as an incompre-

hensible doctrine? Well, what else could they expect? If there be a God, maker and ruler of all things, and that He is for us an object of adoration, is it reasonable to suppose that his Being and Person, could be ought else to us, but incomprehensible. Make that Person comprehensible, and the objects for which He revealed himself—namely, our adoration and obedience—those objects are gone. We will not adore what we can perfectly and naturally understand.

Well, but it is said, "Is it fair to assert that the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed? Why, the word "Trinity" cannot be found within the covers of the Bible." That is quite true—but then the revelation is not in the name; the name simply describes a revelation which was made in the beginning. The word "diphtheria," as descriptive of a very awful disease was not coined until about sixty-nine years ago, but there is full reason for believing that the disease was minutely described in the second century and that it was epidemic in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The name is not infectious and contagious—the name does not

kill, but it aptly and correctly describes a disease that spreads terror everywhere. A synod of "the universal church" if it could only be assembled to-morrow, might invent a new name for the doctrine of the person of God, but if it held to revelation the doctrine would remain exactly the same—just as you might give a new name to diphtheria, but the novel title would neither retard, nor expedite the disease, or justify a change in the treatment.

Now, how did this doctrine of the Trinity gain its name? First, "the word" came into use in the second century, coined most likely by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, to express the idea of three persons in one Godhead; just as the word "diphtheria" was coined by a renowned Frenchman to express a membranous exudation on the tonsils and back of the throat. Both words in their respective fields justify their own existence. They are useful, expressive words.

Why was the word invented? The early Christians, as is plain from their writings, believed in but one God—but they also regarded the Father as God, the Son as God,

the Holy Ghost as God. They made no attempt to define the mystery, but were content to use the divine terms just as they were used in Scripture. Any student of "The Apostolic Fathers," can see this without being a close student—it is palpable on the face of their writings. This was all very well until on the one hand, some began to teach that Christ was inferior to the Father, and others that it was the Father who assumed the form of the man Christ and was crucified. Such views, of course, led to an investigation into the person of the Divine Being of God as revealed in Scripture and brought it to the front as the all important question of the hour.

Now, where was the field of investigation? In one sense it was a comparatively small on one, for the Church fashioned its faith on the teaching of Scripture. There was but one God, that was clear; but Christ was God, that was clear; and the Holy Spirit was God, that was clear. How could such an incomprehensible doctrine be made plain and explainable to men? The Church replied:

"Do not attempt to explain it; do not strive to make it plain; publish to the world exactly what the Scriptures teach, and leave that simple scriptural announcement as the faith of the Church, to be received unquestioned by her children, as a concise outline of God's revelation of himself." Thus was given to the Church "the Nicene Creed," a creed which never professed to be anything more or anything else than the Church's announcement of what the "Holy Scriptures" taught with regard to the person of God.

As to the mystery of the Trinity—well, you cannot seek to realize any idea of God apart from mystery of some kind. Mr. Herbert Spencer in his philosophy aims at "elucidating or making clear the fundamental and the universal principles which science has established within the sphere of rational investigation." His philosophy is meant to make "great principles" clear. Well, how does he clear up the idea of God?

Here are his words: "But one truth must grow ever clearer—the truth that there is an inscrutable existence everywhere manifested, to which the man of science can conceive

neither beginning nor end. Among the mysteries which become more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty that the man of science is ever in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed."

Now, I place this elucidating idea side by side with the doctrine of the Trinity, and one seems just as mysterious to me as the other. I ask Mr. Spencer what is your idea of what we Christians understand by the word God; and he answers, "What you call God is "an inscrutable existence," "an infinite and eternal energy," as far as I know, "without beginning or end" and "from which all things proceed." I admire the rythmic roll of the words, and I endorse them as far as they go; but I have received no more light as to the person of God under the new philosophy, than I had under the old creed. So much for the mystery connected with the Trinity as revealed in the Gospel. I need look for nothing but mystery—that is plain.

But out of the mystery comes a scriptural message that appeals straight to my under-

standing. This God whom I cannot define, analyze or understand, loves me; loves me even in my sin, and has left nothing undone on his part to prove his love. The Father loves me, the Son loves me, the Holy Ghost loves me, and combined in one love, is my eternal salvation if I will only give my heart and sins to God, through Jesus Christ. All that, as connected with my individual being, I can understand, because it appeals to my heart and my life and my conscience, and brings God down to the level of my existence. The "mystery," I thankfully and willingly leave until God wills it should be a mystery no longer, but the "message" out of the mystery, I grasp, as a drowning man, the friendly rope, and trust it to death, as the one only hope of my salvation.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.
Luke xi: 5.

It is claimed by some, whose intellectual superiority and scientific knowledge is freely admitted, that we must look for the perfect, earth-born man, in front of us, not behind us. This statement is the natural outcome of a system of popular philosophy, which regards everything as being under the law of universal advancement whereby the "fittest" must survive; a consolatory law, no doubt, for the "fittest," and naturally a popular law, for whatever may be lacking in the man of the nineteenth century, personal conceit cannot fairly be placed on the list.

Now, whatever views persons may take as to the revealed character and inspiration of the Bible, one thing is certain, that it is a very

old record ; as far as its delineations of life are concerned, it reaches back a long way. And not only is it an old record, but it appears to be a singularly faithful record. For to-day, in the east, in migratory tribes you meet twin-like representatives of Abraham ; in business, world over, who does not meet unregenerate Jacobs ? in politics, double-minded Balaams ; in friendship, excitable Peters and traitor Judases, and in the world at large, Eves led astray through lies and stirred-up vanity, and Adams led astray through straying Eves ? Here and there the murder of to-day may be more cunningly worked out than the murder of Abel, but it is none the less deadly ; the mob that shouted the Lord Jesus to death, or stoned Stephen is, as a rule, just like our modern mobs, and mothers of to-day spoil children as Rachel did, and fathers as Eli. Hence, if this " perfect man " is before us physically, intellectually, ethically, he must be an unthinkable distance ahead of us, with these Abrahams and Jacobs and Peters and Judases walking about our streets, fresh as ever, and apparently with as strong a grip of life as their first known representatives had

in their day and generation. The fact is, deducting the veneer and polish of education and civilization, we are pleasantly, or most unpleasantly like our earliest forefathers, Aryan, Semitic, Turanian, whatever they may have been.

Now, as an evidence of this world-wide persistency of type, what a beautiful picture of Christ-loved life our text brings before us, eighteen hundred years old, and yet a photograph of what may be seen in the church of God to-day! This family of Bethany lived out its short span of life, the tide of time rose, swept over it and wiped it out, and yet the family type has never been so improved on as to be lost in the waters of the high tide of progression. All Marthas were not wiped out when Martha was buried, or no Martha has much improved since the Martha of Bethany died. The Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus, the unobtrusive Lazarus who died and rose again; these have faded out centuries ago into "the land of the leal," but there are Marys many, and Lazaruses not a few, and Marthas, thank God, within the fold of God's wide church to-day; and hence,

the lesson I would have you to learn from the family of Bethany is not alone the fixedness of humanity, but also the wide variety of character, disposition and feeling, that God plainly allows within his church, to learn it as a comfort and encouragement in all your efforts after higher things.

Notice the plain statement made as to this family. We are told distinctly that as a family the Lord Jesus loved it—"now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"—a cataloguing of love that appears to have a meaning in it, as if it said "Take Lazarus at his best or worst Jesus loved him," and so loved He Mary, and so loved He Martha, He loved them all, He loved them each."

Let all quiet, unobtrusive, self-hiding Christian people take heart as they realize that Jesus loved Lazarus. For there was nothing great or wonderful about this man; he was essentially one who gained a public recognition through his connection with others. We know nothing personal about him at all, save that he was "the brother of Mary and Martha," and that our Lord raised him from the dead. He was one of the

" overshadowed ones," overshadowed by the strong character and force of will of Martha, and by the exalted pietism of Mary—a good brother you may be sure, a respected fellow villager, it is plain—but one of these quiet, self-hidden men, who was generally spoken of as the brother of two well known women, and yet Jesus most unquestionably loved Lazarus.

Now, if our perfect man is yet before us, we have gained little since the days of Lazarus, and I say " thank God," for I would not miss Lazarus round the King's board for a good deal. People who live the calm, quiet life of unobtrusive daily duty, who go in and out of duty's door with muffled steps ; noiseless Christian souls who live perhaps a routine life, yet live it well, and purely, and honestly. They gaze sometimes amazed at the restless energy of Martha and feel very weak religiously as they notice the exalted piety of Mary. " I could never accomplish or even " aim at a tithe of what Martha does," they say ; " I could, certainly, never feel as Mary," and yet, every day is a quiet, wholesome day lived out on lines of honest duty ; the father

in his office or workshop, the mother in her nursery or household, the mechanic at his worn work-table, "the daily round, the common task," with Christ looking on, because, remember, He loved Lazarus, and saying, though Lazarus may hear Him not, "Servant of God, well done." From time immemorial it has been so; from Jesus until now it has been so. A step is heard outside; the busy bustling Martha asking somewhat sharply, because, when busy, she does not care to be interrupted, "Who is that?" and the quiet Mary replying, "Oh! its only Lazarus!" only! yet remember, and take heart at it, quiet, gentle people, that Jesus loved Lazarus.

And He loved Martha. Martha with push and energy enough in her to accomplish any clearly defined duty within her womanly reach. Martha who could never be anywhere without all near her knowing it; Martha at times rebuking, at times argumentative, without a grain of poetry in her; common sense, literal almost to rudeness; but, then, the type of women that, married and motherly, would give birth to great men, children like the Maccabees, or, in other lands and climes,

to the restless Norseman — "venturesome, "self-reliant, proud, with a dash of hardness "running through his virtues."

A great, deep love, you may be sure, lay in this strong woman's heart for her quiet plodding brother, and her high-strung and spiritually minded sister, but both, no doubt, at times seemed to her to fall "far short" of her ideal standard. For Martha's standard was clearly, hard, plain, common-sense usefulness, and great open-handed acceptance of rational responsibility, ready to shoulder any duty and shoulder it without fear of failure. Duty, common duty — faced and finished—everything done, and done well; the room cleaned up, and the strong voice saying—not so much thankfully, as like a clerk checking off work—"Well! thank God, that's done." Not an irreligious or worldly-minded woman by any means, but one whose prayers and alms, and personal hopes, and judgment of others, were all bound up in a deep overwhelming sense of personal responsibility to the day and hour, to the hearth and home.

Well, it ought to be a comfort to thousands

of Martha-like women within the church that Jesus loved this woman for her worth's sake, that is, He saw worth in her. Behind and beneath this seeming worldliness and the noise and the bustle of her life lay, or stood, this grand sense of certainty as to the fulfilment of responsible duty towards the common things of common life, and Christ saw what lay beneath and valued it. A blessed thought for Martha-like representatives of to-day, hard-run, hard-wrought men and women, who rise early and rest late, who finish the tale of bricks that every day demands; women who find a ceaseless Dorcas in their own households, a never ending school with their own children, or men with duty swallowing ever moment in office, store or business, to make both ends meet, and yet Jesus valuing them, and putting a high price on them, loving them for their worth's sake and saying of them wherever they are honest and no excusing, "Servants of God, well done."

But Jesus also, we are told, loved Mary, and this no one wonders at; for her whole heart, and soul, and being seems to have been

alive with devotion to a personal and living Christ—a pure, devout, contemplative soul; one so full of an exquisite and all absorbing faith in word and look of her master, that scepticism or doubt would be as foreign to her nature as impurity of thought, and worldliness as open sin. A woman that would lose herself in contemplation, "bringing all heaven before her eyes"; one that would die for Christ as willingly as live for him—possibly at times would sooner die. One who lived to feel in her deepest heart, what we so often willingly sing, yet so slightly feel:

> "Jesu, my God, I thee adore
> "O make me love thee more and more."

Well, Jesus loved Mary, and all like Mary, pure of heart—the ideal race of high sanctity through the long ages of the Church's life. A Mary, such as Monica, the mother of Augustine—the first pure Mary-like women who fled the world to find a higher spirituality and purity of soul within secluded walls; the pietists of the seventeenth century, well called the monks and nuns of high-strung Protestantism; the early Methodist

women testifying for Christ, and singing his praises in the midst of brutal mobs; Plymouthism in its earliest and only practical stage ere vulgar conceit and rabid bigotry blighted its beauty—these all, surely, of Mary, Mary-like, came within the sphere of the Master's love, as all will ever come, who, sitting before the glass in which men see darkly, gaze, and gaze on, and yet gaze and pray like the martyrs, "Lord, how long?"

What lessons may we learn from all this!

First, that from Adam down to the present hour human nature, rough-hewn and Godless, or God-hewn and holy, has passed through little change; that the bad-living are as bad as ever with the venue of badness possibly changed; that the good are as good as ever neither better nor worse, but good enough after an old type or fashion for God to love. If we have Adams and Eves, and Cains, and Balaams, and Judases and Pilates, thank God we have Abels, and Enochs, and Abrahams, Marys and Marthas, and Lazuruses, Monicas, and Melancthons, Frys, Carpenters and Nightingales—old gems, brilliant in a new setting and all running backward in type to

the original of the species — God in Christ.

And another lesson, abides hard to learn, yet strong and forcible. Beware of that narrow-minded bigotry that, canonizing Mary, and all like her as saints, would rule out Martha, and possibly Lazarus from the Church of God, and warn poor Martha back from the table of the Lord. For Martha was not what one would call exactly a spiritually minded woman — but then she was an honest, blunt, and dutiful woman, loving Christ in her own way, and Jesus loved her. But you know there are some that think, unless we are all like Mary we are in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. Do not fall into that unscriptural mistake.

Then again beware of that worship of common sense, of recognized rules and orders, and fashion of thinking and doing things, that would wipe out Mary as a useless star-gazing enthusiast; that would say, "The less we have of that element amongst us, the better" Remember that "that element" existed strongly in the family that Jesus loved; that that element had in it what he called the "better part," and be not rash in

your criticism of Christian character. There is room for Mary as well as Martha in the Church of God. Both are useful in their places if in their hearts the love of Jesus is a reality.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

And he was angry, and would not go in.
St. Luke xv: 28.

This well-known parable, when spoken, had plainly a primary and a secondary meaning.

In the primary sense the prodigal represents the Jewish publicans, who having fallen from national grace by selling themselves as willing instruments of Roman tryanny, became, not unnaturally, the scorned outcasts of the whole Jewish nation. In the eyes of patriotism they had left their father's house, they had sold everything connected with it, honor, nationality, decency, and they had gone down into the filth and mire and degradation that ever seem the ultimate lot of all spies and informers and tools of tyranny.

The elder brother, judging by the context,

is the faithful and patriotic Jew; the Pharisee, he who would perish rather than resign one national tradition, change one national custom, or copy or patronize one foreign fashion. He is the lineal descendent of the stout-hearted, stiff-necked Mordecai, loving his country next to God, if not, as God.

The father in the parable is God; God speaking to the whole Jewish nation through Christ, who calls all; and these outcast publicans listen to the call, are heart pierced by it, repent and weep. Some fling up their hated offices, believe in Him, follow Him, love Him, and He receives them all.

Then the parable shows how the conservative Jew turns on Christ, and through Christ on God, arraigns His mercy, gives it short trial and short shrift, and condemns it root and branch. All the unsanctified bile within the man rises and almost chokes him. "Is *he*, he asks, the faithful, loyal, devoted, hard-working son — is *he* to be placed on a level with the mire-daubed outcast, fellow-countryman though he be? Is he to be expected to blot out all the past, almost do homage to the prodigal, feast with him, sit

down with him, welcome him?" Never! And so, spite of fatherly explanation and entreaty, he puts on the mailed armour of his insulted purity, and, holier than the God of holiness, he stands out in the wide field of his own cultivated unforgiveness, alone, and proud in his loneliness.

The secondary application shifts the field from the narrow limits of Judæa, and applies it to the world. The father is God; the prodigal, his baptized child who defiles and breaks his covenant, flings off all religious restraint, courts, rather than fights, the world, the flesh and the devil, sinks down as low in sin, and shame and lust and folly as man can sink, then rises from the mire of his guilt, sin-daubed and foul, cries out for pardon, receives it bountifully and is reinstated in the old home. In this sense the parable is an outline of the whole scheme of redemption which provides pardon for the vilest, through the love and mercy of God, the Father of us all.

But in the secondary sense, who, or what, is this strange mortal, the elder brother? He cannot certainly be a wholly

bad man, for he is described as the trustworthy and trusted son. "Son," says God, "Son, thou art ever with me." Nor is he one of those miserable toadying abortions of religious life, trading on religion for his own advancement; because he is described as being positively entitled to the blessings of religion an an heir of God. "Son," says God, "all that I have is thine." Hence if the prodigal son is a pardoned sinner, then certainly this elder son is in some sense a well established saint.

And yet one cannot look at him without feeling that he is mournfully unlovely. Orthodoxy is a very necessary thing, but to be more orthodox than God is, to say the least of it, presumptuous. Then rigid purity and uprightness are, of course, necessary, commendable and proper; but when such graces lead to a positive disregard of all tenderness and pity towards others, to stamping out sympathy in toto, they become blots and stains rather than virtues and graces. He is altogether unlovely, although he may be very good. Look at him.

There is music and dancing and feasting

in the house, and God approves of it all. Who ordered the feast? God. Who said that the dresses and jewellery were to be produced, and everything made bright and pleasing to the eye? God. Who evidently gave the command, "Be ye happy; let mirth and laughter ring through the house, forget the past, be joyful in the present, and hope for the best in the future?" God.

But here is one out in the field alone who does not believe in God's policy. There he is, looking at the lights and shadows as they cross the windows, listening to the sounds of mirth and music, and that man is as sad and wretched and miserable through his own distorted goodness as any living man can well be. He is positively jealous of God's distributed love, because he feels it ought all to be his; lights, and music and laughter are tokens of so much stolen love, stolen from him. He should own the father and all contained in the father; that whole scene is a violation of the sanctity of well earned affection that should find no resting-place but on his own bosom. It would be an insult to self for him to re-echo a laugh or do ought else than

frown down the whole thing. He cannot stop it, but he can refrain from taking part in it. Better the lone field and consistency, than the bright room full of happy faces turned towards God.

Now, are there such people in the home of God, Christians? Yes. There are elder brothers to be found in the purest lives. Those who fortunately have from childhood kept their purity, those who were born again of God, almost in human birth, those whose blessings have been great, and temptations few, and whose lives have been unpolluted by any one gross sin or failure. Yet these are the very persons who often are naturally tempted to be hard and harsh, unsympathising, and unforgiving. They ask none to make allowances for them, and they make none for others. They ask no sympathy and give none; or, if willing to forgive, they cannot forget. This is their temptation. God help them, they are the purest, cleanest, holiest, yet most unlovely characters on earth.

Then there is the doctrinal elder brother. Men who measure the Bible itself by their ideas of the Bible. Men who fashion the

love of God according to their ideas of what the love of God ought to be. Men who view God through a diminishing glass, his image perfect, but so small as to dwarf divinity itself and make it as small as themselves.

God says that "Christ died for all." They say, "Yes, all for whom he died." God says he is a father to prodigals and swine-feeders, and husk-eaters. They say that he is a father only to those who can call him father, in a loud clear voice, without tremor, or nervousness, or whisper. God says there is healing for those who barely touch his garment's hem; who hide the touch itself, or touch as if they touch not. They say the crowd must be broken through, and thrust aside, whilst the sinner grasps the Saviour and holding fast cries out, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Now the horror of all this lies in its unholiness. There is nothing in this stern, dogmatic, and often jealous-minded christian, that provides for the tears of a growing or hidden penitence, or the growing intentions of a sin awakened life. He might forgive the sinner for the mire that once daubed his

character, but he could never forget that once he had been mired. Such a man is unfit to judge of a sinner struggling homeward, and battling upwards. He can never forget that he who struggles is tainted. The skin may look like alabaster, but underneath is the impure taint that is only waiting to break out, and disfigure all. "What could you expect?" he asks. "What could you hope for? He fed swine, he ate husks."

Now what are the dangers here?

God's will, is not only that the son should come home, but that he should stay at home. "My Son," He calls him, "thy brother." But God's will may be frustrated by man, and there are few who frustrate it more than your hard, jealous-minded, fault-hunting, and fault-following Christian.

I am the last to claim for penitents that paltry spirit of sentimentality which positively puts a premium on sin by petting and lauding the sinner. But I say it is enough to drive out all good intention—to ruin a man, if every effort and strain he makes after goodness, is not only criticised harshly, but imputed to evil. If after, it may be, years

of hard effort to improve—after prayers and strugglings and victories, deep down in the heart of the criticiser lies the thought, "I do not believe in him. I do not trust him. I may forgive, but I can never forget. He fed swine. He ate husks."

It is enough to ruin any man, but it is almost certain death to a young man. Starved, hungry, outcast, penitent, he asks for bread, and Christians, holy people, hand him a lump of ice, and say, "revive on that." That is bad enough, but what if he has courage to take even that, and then seek his own bread, and gain it, and make it honestly, by beating down, through grace of God, old habits, by watchfulness and prayer and fasting, and that he is a new man, and that he says to his elder brother, who was always pure, "love me now, trust me now," and that the hard, harsh reply comes, "I forgive you but I cannot forget, you fed swine, you ate husks." I tell you the utter ruin of such a younger brother, soul and body, may rest on the other man.

But there is danger, and terrible danger for the elder brother as well. The father is

in the house happy with the prodigal, and God is in heaven joyful in the thought, that a lost soul is returning, and the smile on God's face is reflected on the faces of his angels. What is the danger then to the elder brother? Surely of becoming unlike God. God is love and this man,—this man is jealousy, or hardness, or narrow-mindedness. The smile is on God's face, the frown on his; God's heart is warm and full of love, his is cold as ice; God hopes the best for the penitent, and is ready to help and encourage him; this man thinks the worst—augurs evil rather than good, and is an obstacle to success instead of an aid; God not only forgives but forgets and hopes out into the future; this elder brother will not forget, but lives in the past and practically treats the penitent as a fraud and hypocrite. Oh! do you not see how such a life steadily moves a man back into the lonely field farther away from God, and that the longer he thus lives and feels, the greater the distance?

Brethren, is it not well that those of us who profess to love God should review our lives, and see whether this evil spirit that

enters into the higher life to blast it, may not be tampering with ourselves? "He fed swine, he ate husks," does the saying of that come easy to us, and have we, behind the words the feeling that gives them strength and vigor. If so, believe me, the sooner we leave the lonely field and enter the house, and push through the crowd of happy guests, and seek out the Father, and go down on our knees before Him, and say, "Father I have sinned," the better for our souls. For in such a case we are the prodigal. We have left our father's house. If we have not gone into a distant country, we have gone into a lonely field, and if we have not wasted our substance on riotous living, we are fast wasting it on jealousy and pride.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

And he said, let me go for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Genesis xxxii : 26.

What was it that in a religious sense was so plainly lacking in the character of Jacob? Again and again you think you are on the track of a godly man, when suddenly he does something, says something that shows you that you are altogether astray. He irritates you. You feel that you wish to like him, desire to make the best of him, but he will not let you. He appears to thwart you at every turn, and just as you think you have caught at something permanently good, with his own hands he pulls down the character that you are doing your best to build up out of the scanty materials at your disposal.

That in one sense he was a religious man all through his record, you can have no doubt. He avails himself of Esau's hunger to lead him to barter his birthright, but he will not close the bargain until Esau swears in God's name that he will keep his side of it. He goes through the shameful scene of cunningly devised deception with his poor old father. What for ? That Isaac may give him the divine blessing before death seals the old man's prophet voice. As he sleeps in Haran and sees the vision of angels, and wakes up out of his sleep ; his awakening words are magnificently—almost dramatically religious,—" Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place—this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven ; " but then the whole soul is taken out of his words by the bargain of reciprocity that he seeks to drive with God : " O God, if you protect me, if you feed me, if you clothe me and bring me back in peace, then I will give my whole heart to you, and more than that, then I will give you a tenth of all my profits." What an extraordinary chaos of

religious ideas! For surely religiousness in some shape is there.

Yes, he clings to his chaotic idea of God all through. "Am I God," he says to Rachel, "that I can make you a mother." When consulting in secret with his wives about leaving Laban, he tells them that "the God of his father had been with him," that "God did not allow Laban to hurt him," that "God had given him Laban's cattle"—not Jacob's trick, but God, —and there is a grand solemnity about the parting scene between Laban and Jacob, the interchange of solemn vows and words, all religious. "God is witness betwixt thee and me, the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, the God of their fathers judge between us."

Now was this all hypocrisy? I certainly would not like to say so. I can well fancy the state of mind that Jacob typifies—nay more, I think it is a very common state of mind, and that our nineteenth-century Jacobs are many, commoner, perhaps, than nineteenth-century Esaus.

Surely there are thousands whose whole belief, and that sometimes a very strong

belief, may be summed up in these words, "I believe in the God of my fathers." Why, the bitterest religious warfares that have ever been waged have been fought out under the power of these words, and the amount of traditional religion that exists in the minds of men, sometimes their sole and only religion is far greater than many thoughtless people would imagine. Well, Jacob was plainly one of these. There is nothing wrong in the principle of this traditional religion, for God himself said to Jacob, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac;" the wrong comes in where we keep on saying that, and in a way feeling that, yet at the same time trading on a man's hunger to get his birthright, and trading on a father's blindness to get his blessing, and using our rough scientific knowledge so as to add to our flocks and herds at the expense of our neighbour, even though our neighbour would do the same to us if he had the knowledge. But is not this hypocrisy? In one sense, yes; but it may be gross religious ignorance, lack of God's spirit in our hearts, a wrong

idea of what religion really is. A sense that we are all right as long as we walk on the paths our fathers walked on, never taking into consideration the short cuts and by paths that we have made for ourselves, and that our fathers would have scorned to walk on. In short, traditional religion is, as a rule, an utterly worthless power for good if the soul, the heart, the spirit of a man is not in it. It is "the shadow of a shade, the baseless fabric of a vision."

Then there are many who live wholly on what I might theologically call "natural religion" clothed in the garments of revelation. They believe in God, you would shock them if you imputed to them non-belief on this point; nay, they believe in "a hand that moves the world," in a general kind of way; they believe in a Christ that died in a general kind of way; they believe in worship and service in a general kind of way, but they draw a clear marked, distinct line between their actions in the world and the great God above. For them there is the sphere of religion, and the sphere of business, and the sphere of pleasure, and each sphere has its

own orbit, and should keep within it. Well, do you know I think that entered into Jacob's creed for three parts of his life. You might sum up his creed now in two clauses. "I believe in the God of my fathers and I believe that each sphere should move in its own orbit." Poor, paltry creed, leaving a man as bare of soul life, and spirit growth, as if his "fathers" never had a God, as if no such thing as practical, personal, day of judgment religion ever existed. For in truth, for fathers, for Jacob, for you, for me, there is but one sphere, my rounded life, containing within it, religion, business, pleasure, everything, and that life is all due to God.

What did Jacob make out of his various orbits. Oh, he did well; he went out a pauper and came back in a cloud of dust that you could see miles away. But what about his shaking misery when he realized, like a flash of lightning, that he had worked and slaved and gathered his flocks and herds and droves, only that Esau might swoop down on them in common justice, strip him bare and naked of everything that he had (as you and I will be stripped naked on the day of

judgment) and turn him back on the desert a pauper; taught the awful lesson that my faith, not my father's, saves me, and that my life is one rounded whole, due to God, in religion, in business, in everything? I tell you, as a raft of timber may go for hundreds of miles in safety down a river and yet break up into pieces at a given point, never to be forgotten by him accountable for its safety, so Jacob's creed just went to pieces and floated here and there and everywhere as he stood close to the brook of Jabbok and shook from head to foot as the thought of Esau's terrible retribution flashed upon him.

Oh! how God works! "The mills of the gods grind slowly but sure," and sure often in mercy and in love. If ever man might have blest a spot on earth, Jacob might have blest Jabbok, as he did, for there he saw not angels ascending and descending on the heavenly ladder, but God coming down to him. For the first time possibly in his life, Jacob flings himself on God. "O, God," he says, "how blind I have been, blind, blind to thy truth which thou hast showed unto me; I am not worthy—I am not worthy of

the least of thy mercies poured out on me like water. Save me from Esau, save me from the hand of my brother for I fear him." Ah! there is something real here. Here is a new kind of Jacob that we have not seen before or heard. This man is seeking after God as a real personal power, able to enter into his life and fashion and mould it. This man stakes all safely on God. "You save me, you save,"—the cry is intense, unmistakable, God-reaching as well as real, just as the apostle once cried, "Save Lord, we perish."

And then came that wondrous night of struggling, with whom or how, none can tell, but it seemed to Jacob as if he struggled with One who held his blessing for time and eternity, who held it strongly and would not let it go. On through the darkness of the night the struggle lasted; 'twas life or death for Jacob. And then when morning dawned, and the stranger still holding to the blessing cried out to Jacob to cease the struggle and let him go, back came the magnificent words of a faith born in one night, strong as the faith of Stephen, "I will not let thee go. You need not think it. I will hold on till I

wring the blessing out of thee. I will not let thee go except thou bless me." And then came the blessing, and with the blessing came the real Jacob, the converted, turned, changed Jacob, the Jacob who had found God for himself, who had brought God into his own life, who had given his life to God. His creed no longer is merely " I believe in the God of my fathers," nor is it a creed based on the deadly error that " life and religion are distinct things," but the magnificent personal living creed, " I believe in God for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

You explain all the difficulties in connection with Jacob's life when you realize the difference between nominal, traditional religion and a personal, living, vital faith. What he needed, what we all need in our lives, is our own, not any one else's religion, and our own religion permeating our life as one life, due to God, and if Haran with its vision of angels, its mercies and brightness fails to bring us this, then God may lead us down to Jabbok and the struggle for life in the dark ; but if the blessing comes out of it, and that I

see God face to face in rosy day dawn, what care I for the darkness! To get Christ, to have Christ, to feel him in my life and keep him there, to go into any darkness that I may come out of it ready to live for Christ, this is real religion, and hence if Haran brings it not to me thank God for Jabbok. For there is no love or passion, there is no gain that man can compass on earth, there is no pleasure that for a time can light up life, that is not worth surrendering and beating under foot to gain Christ. We have reached the highest summit of man's happiness when we can say, "To me to live is Christ."

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

And Samson called unto the Lord and said: O Lord God remember me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

Judges xvi: 28.

The story of Samson is one of those scriptural records as to which one sometimes asks, Why was it preserved and sent down on the pages of inspiration for your reading and mine? Because there is nothing of a noble or lofty nature in the man's life at all; there is not a shadow of a shade of spirituality, and his reported words—many of them—seem more suited for a jest-book than a Bible. And although his story kindles in one's mind an admiration for the rough rude giant, such as one might possess for a huge dog, still the question remains, Why did such a life ever get a place on the pages of Scripture?

Well, I think God gave it place mainly as a standing lesson and warning against "waste."— waste of life and gifts and opportunities, and as a fearful lesson how a destiny may be distorted and wrecked through the ungoverned passions of the gifted possessor. For in the case of Samson, God plainly meant the man to be one thing, and the man exercising his free will made himself another thing.

God meant him to be a Nazarite, not only in profession but in spirit,that strange office which gave the holder of it something of a priestly character and a dignity in regard to sanctity equal to that of a high priest. God meant him to be separated by sanctity and consecration of life from others, to be a living evidence of the purified will, that can rule as monarch over the baser passions, and to set an example to the common herd of that "higher life" which finds no repose outside of God. For this office, and in an age when the Nation was the Church, and the Church was not only militant but military, God endowed Samson with great bodily strength, and this strength in its genesis and righteous

exercise was justly called "the Spirit of the Lord," because it was unquestionably God's special gift.

But although Samson recognized to the fullest extent the Divine source of this physical power, he never seemed to have realized that his sacred office and gifts suited to office, both alike, brought with them special responsibilities, and that he was accountable to the giver for the manner in which he exercised his office and used his gift. "Am I fulfilling my office and am I using my gift to bring glory to God through the channel of my vow?" was a question that he seems never to have asked himself. He simply dishonored his office and wasted his gift; poured out the latter like water on the ground, used it to gratify his own mad passions or his fickle humours, in short, lived the life of an irresponsible worldling, driven as a leaf here and there and everywhere by the uncurbed desires of his untrained and restless mind. He seemed to have retained but one solitary article of religious belief, and he held to that with grip of iron—belief in a living, personal, powerful God. His faith

here was supreme, at the back of all his wild, abandoned recklessness loomed out in terrific grandeur—God.

If you desire to see how Samson the Nazarite failed to fulfil his office, and wasted his gifts, place him side by side with Samuel the Nazarite, standing before a whole nation and closing up his consecrated life of responsible service with the magnificent words: "Bring your accusation against me if you can; weigh my public life, sift my religious motives and give your verdict." What a splendid picture of responsible service, and how the giant Samson with frame of iron and voice of thunder, withers and wilts into nothing in the presence of his great successor.

Or fancy John the Nazarite acting as Samson did. Fancy John, no longer the God-inspired preacher, whose words of awful responsibility rolled through the desert as if they rang the knell of sin, but the loud, noisy jester of the wilderness whose laughter rang through the desert, and whose bloody vengeful jokes, so full of cruelty, formed the talk of street corners in Jerusalem. Fancy

John, the chairman of the riotous feast; John, the riddle-maker; John, betting thirty suits of clothing that the riddle would not be found out, and when it was discovered—through fraud—going down to the village of the winner, killing thirty of his fellow villagers, stripping their dead bodies of their suits, bringing the clothing back to the feast and flinging the bloody pile down on the board and saying, "There is your payment." Fancy John, through mad revenge, dressed up as joking; fancy John, I say, destroying a whole harvest of God in the fields of his enemies, sending the crafty jackals, with blazing tails into the standing corn of his crafty foes. "Jackal against jackal" he cries, as he smites his thigh with his open hand, and laughs loud and long to see the lines of fire spread rapidly through the golden grain. Above all, fancy John, who lost his life through a woman's hate because from a sense of overwhelming responsibility he rebuked a woman's crime; fancy John, himself tainted, unclean, impure, joking and fooling an impure woman about his gift from God, and at last, snared by her, stagger-

ing blinded in an open courtyard, acting the fool before his brutal enemies, that he might fool them and through his folly wipe them out of life, even though their deaths could only be brought about by his. Fancy all this, and where is your grand, noble God consecrated John the Nazarite? Thank God, not here; but Samson the Nazarite is here, the giant who wasted his giant gifts, the magnificent man who distorted and wrecked his own sacred destiny.

It is a sad story, because though always lost to a sense of responsibility, the man, as I said, was not wholly bad. A rough, rude kind of dogged, persistent faith in God was always present in him, and sometimes it burst out brightly in his prayers and vows. Even his last recorded prayer – bitter as vinegar, corrosive as vitriol—shows an unshaken trust in God, though what a God! "O God be on my side now, for this once give me everything I ask: Vengeance! Vengeance on the cowards that put out my two eyes." An awful prayer, but still a prayer, and one of savage, brutal faith—but faith.

Now where are the lessons from this

strange life? First, a lesson for those whose office in many ways may furnish points of contact with that of the Nazarite, the ministers and stewards of God, those who like him are separated for holy duties; those like him, gifted, if they will but claim their gifts; those like him, accountable to the living God, as no other man can be accountable, doubly accountable in light of judgment, for themselves and others.

To all such it seems to me, Samson speaks with tremendous power. He tells us that no mental or physical gifts, or both combined, can make up for the loss of that awful sense of official responsibility which made Samuel and John what they were, and which let men say what they will, is the real secret of a God-born, God-directed ministry. Samuel could rebuke King Saul, and John could rebuke King Herod, because each man felt that he was accountable to the living God for his message; that he must speak not as the individual but as the authorized messenger of God; that once the message burned in his soul, it should come forth, though the message should ring the dead knell of the

speaker; that duty to them was greater than the greatest monarch that ever lived, because by duty they would be condemned, and by duty they would be justified. "For God's sake," Samson seems to say, "take warning by me, I never realized my responsibility. It never once rose above the horizon of my life to light me to my duty. I walked in the starlight, in the moonlight, but never in the sunlight, and I survived as a warning, instead of living as a guide."

But is this responsibility a real thing? Is it? God help the man that doubts it and yet lives within the shadow of the altar. For what is the minister of God set apart for? "To feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with his own blood" and to feed it, by "declaring to it the whole council of God." To serve the Lord with all lowliness of mind, if needs be, with tears and trials; to shrink not from declaring to the lofty and lowly whatever is profitable, to watch himself and watch his flock, to live the life which covets no man's gold or silver, to hold not his own life as selfishly dear unto himself, but to pour it out on his ministry

without stint; nay, with St. Paul to cry "To me to live is Christ;" to spend and be spent for souls, though the more he loves the souls the less the souls love him; and to do all this in the light of the judgment of God, and the great White Throne when he will stand as the messenger before him who gave the message, and claim what none but the responsible and faithful minister can claim, that he is "free from the blood of all."

"Free from the blood," so Pilate madly thought, because pure water washed his trembling hands; but no water that ever flowed, no spring that ever burst from rocky bed in that dread day, can justify the blight and wreck and ruin of an unrepented, wasted ministry of God. For what is wasted? God, His mercy, His love, His death, His cross, His passion; souls famished through lack of fidelity; destinies wrecked through lack of watchfulness; God wasted, and wasted through those who should have watched.

Oh! if I speak to-day, to those who are thinking of entering the sacred ministry, I say to them, "For God's sake touch it not,

add not to your personal responsibility this awful charge, unless you feel that God has called you with a voice that you dare not disobey." For this ministry is a real thing, it is a God-ordained, distinctive institution, weighed down with God-made responsibilities ; to become God's minister is to bring the day of judgment into your daily lives, with tenfold the power that it can ever wield over those who stand without the priesthood, and therefore I say, and say it with the experience of close on thirty years of service, " For God sake touch it not if your heart be filled not with the conviction that, "to me to live is Christ."

Now secondly and lastly, this distinctive weight of responsibility, resting on God's ministers, should teach its lessons to the laity of God's Church.

Do you know what I feel to be our defect in the present day, and the root-secret of much of our non-success in working ? Want of a due appreciation of the responsibility of the ministry. I am a minister and steward of the Church of God. I claim nothing miraculous for my priesthood beyond the mi-

racle that God ever allowed me to preach, and that if I seek His divine aid He will fit my back for my burden, as He fits the layman's back for his. But I hold that I am tenfold more responsible to God than any layman, that of my own free will, I have assumed responsibilities that no layman could be liable for, that my account before the great White Throne must in its nature be different from his, and hence I claim justice at his hands, justice to lead and not be lead, justice to teach and not be taught, justice to rebuke and not to suffer for duty done, justice that will honestly and fairly allow me to prepare for my judgment when I stand before the great White Throne of God. If I have to bear the tremendous responsibility, at least award me a recognition of my birthright in God, at least leave me the only secret of true success, a sense of a God-guided, God-sought responsibility.

And hence no greater error can the laity of God's Church fall into than that of making little of the ministerial office and talking slightly of its responsibilities; making your priest a mere preacher, one whose mission is

to please and who fulfils his mission best when he pleases most. Make little of the office and you degrade the man, divest him of his responsibility to God and he becomes your irresponsible leader. Rob him of his sense of responsibility, not to you, but to God, and the *esprit* of the man's whole work is gone. You become your leader's Delilah, you shear his locks, you steal his strength, and then you wonder where are the men, children of the Church, like the men of old, the giants of the past.

I tell you these men were giants because they believed in the office of giants, as Athanasius believed in his office, as Ambrose, and in the great White Throne, and in the doctrine of the blood of souls, from which St. Paul thanked God he was free, and from which God free weak me and all like me, when the books are opened and the judgment set.

So Samson preaches to him who speaks as well as to you who hear. "For God sake," he says, "realize responsibility." As he lay crushed beneath the mighty pillars that in his new-born strength he drew about him

like a deadly garment, God alone can tell what prayers he may have said, what thoughts he may have felt and what Presence seemed near him at the last. Where is he now? Where will he be when the throne is set and the books are opened? We leave him with God, and with the awful silence of death, and with the hope that springs to life at the thought that, sometimes, even wrecks are saved.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

For we know in part.

1 Cor. xiii : 9.

As the Jew Paul stood in the crowded streets of Athens, out of all the sights of the city that which struck him most forcibly was an altar on which was written an inscription which ran thus: "To the Unknown God." What the original intention of the inscription was is not easy to say, but as St. Paul realized the sense of spiritual indefiniteness conveyed in its words and contrasted it with his own "sure and certain hope," he grasped the words as a striking text, and on them based his first appeal to the half enquiring, half mocking crowd on Mars' Hill. Strange to say if the apostle were on earth to-day, he would find not an altar erected to the "Unknown God," but intelligent, educa-

ted people whose religion consisted of belief in an "Unknown God," of a belief that there can be no definite belief, of a chronic state of positive uncertainty on all points connected with the divine idea. And he would find that this belief took with some the shape of a philosophy; whilst with others it was a somewhat fashionable and easy-going avowal of principles which, without wholly ignoring the religious idea, left it so indefinite as to be practically useless. Let us to-day look into this strange and dangerous phase of religious thought.

Now it is perfectly clear that to a certain extent God must be unknowable. God deals with infinite things; man with finite, and if man's mind is unable to grasp infinite works, beyond broadly realizing them, how much more must he be unable to know to the full, the divine power whence such works proceed. But this is very different from putting all thoughts of the Divine Being aside as wholly "waste thoughts," from resting in the belief that we can know nothing whatever about God; that it is our proper destiny to seek to know every thing

except God. Indeed such a position would not stand for a moment in connection with what are called the works of nature; for I doubt if there be one single work of nature with regard to which we can say "we know everything," although we could say of that same work that our knowledge connected with it is very large, and possibly increasingly so. We know a great deal about the force of electricity, but there is a great deal we do not know, and likely will never know; yet who would dream of ceasing to strive to know about it, because much connected with that force must remain for ever beyond the grasp of human intelligence? Indeed it may fairly be said with regard to all natural forces, that man is capable of knowing a great deal about them, but that in the case of every one of them, there is a limit to his knowledge. Yet such limits never paralyze investigation, or no great mind would ever seek to maintain the position that because he could not understand everything in connection with a given subject, he would rest content with ignorance of the subject itself, and relegate it into the region of things unknowable or unthinkable.

Now this position of partial knowledge of God is exactly the position taken by the Bible from Genesis to the Revelation of St. John. St. Paul sums up the whole drift of Biblical teaching in the simple sentence, "We know in part," and all experience arising from the noblest fields of investigation and all unwarped rational intelligence endorses the statement of the great Apostle as correct "In part," but still sufficiently for all our needs. We know enough of God to lead us to God, and to lead us finally into the great vestibule within which all of us must at some time enter, the ante-room to that state, within which, we are told in another pregnant sentence, "We shall know, even as we are known."

Further, this contentedness with refraining from seeking to know God, is strongly alien to what seems a natural instinct implanted in the very being and constitution of man. Ceasing to strive to know God, contentedness with positive and ever-abiding ignorance as to His being, is wholly an abnormal position. Far back as ever we can go in connection with man, we find him

associated with the Divine idea, resting on it, or seeking after it, or clearer still, bringing it into his life in some shape, as its ruling power, and submitting himself to laws coercive or guiding, which were often antagonistic to the lower feelings of his nature. Out of all colours, races, degrees of intelligence, there has come forth religion in some shape; no one thing human is more universal, and hence it may fairly be claimed that this "seeking after God, if haply we may find him," is a natural and instinctive search. And yet the "haply" is ever in the search. No religion that ever existed on this earth has ever claimed to know God wholly, to have exhausted search. In all religions, whether of God, or gods, or divine spirits, man has been instinctively content with partial knowledge. He has sought to know more, he has never claimed to know all, and he has shrunk back instinctively from the position of knowing nothing. "Jehovah, Jove or Lord," whatever the name, there was a claimed knowledge and total ignorance was a crime.

Indeed this instinct is so strong that the

great apostle of "agnosticism," as this school of thought is called, cannot himself refrain from admitting that religion can never wholly lose its influence over the human mind. As he looks forward prophetically into the ages yet to come of the world's highest culture, when every form of what he calls superstition, including Christianity, will be thrown aside, he can never see the day when religion of some kind will not hold its own ; when a pulpit of some kind will not be a power, and when preachers of some kind will not exhort and teach in the name and interest of an indefinite something that will take the place of our conception of God. And this prophetic vision alone arises in the mind of this great modern philosopher, from the fact that all his great and far-reaching investigations have fixed indelibly on his mind the conclusion that man is instinctively a religious being, and that he is a worshipping being, whether he worship a dead forefather, or gods, or one God, or as he believes the coming man will, "a great unknowable something from which all things proceed."

A stranger position than this could not be

imagined. For if God is to fade out into an unknowable, incomprehensible being, past all hope of human search, and wholly outside of all human contact—why any worship? Why any pulpit? Why any preacher? As well worship the idea of "perpetual motion" or preach of its beneficence, as to strive to concentrate the lingering embers of a world's religious fervour around an abstract thought of a being or power whose nature, influence and connection with man are wholly unintelligible and past all finding out.

It is, of course, comparatively easy to think out novel views such as these, and even honestly to propagate them, but it is not always the gift of one who fashions a new faith to see with clearness the practical results that may ensue from his teaching. I have no doubt that a very deep feeling of undefined, yet real reverence, may, in some minds, be associated with what is called "agnosticism;" that with some it is a refuge from open, avowed and dogmatic denial of God; but I am equally sure that many who seek it as a permanent refuge, find in due

time that it is but a halting-place, a half-way house, to practical avowed atheism.

No amount of theorizing can change the nature of man, and if it be part of that nature to give and take, to bestow and receive, to look in some shape for an equivalent, it is merely a question of time how long an individual will continue to reverence a being or power who never touches, never influences, or in any shape or form, recognizes the individual who gives such a power reverence.

For in the nature of things the question will in time arise, "What is there to reverence?" If I strike a gong it gives forth a sound; but in reverence I lift up my eyes to this unknowable Being, I lift them up and that is all; I lift them up for years and that is all; and that is all there ever can be for me, for any one If I lift up my eyes to the mountains, shadows steal across them in varied beauty; if I lift up my eyes to the heavens, clouds fleck them, there is something to respond to look, but here, there is nothing, nothing but a dead, dull, irresponsible idea. Why should I reverence it? Why

play the hypocrite here? Why, having gone so far, should I not go one step further and say positively, "There is no God." And thus the house of refuge crumbles to the dust, and the individual stands alone, on the bare, barren heath of isolated atheism.

"We know in part," says the Apostle, "be content with it; hereafter we will know more, perhaps all." Why not rest there? Man has but a limited life, and even if every hour of that life brought in its harvest of knowledge, it would find him at the last, far more conscious of his ignorance than of ought else. Seek then to know God, seek to know him as He reveals himself in Christ Jesus; let every year of life's experience bring in its harvest of deeper knowledge. But think not to exhaust God, to analyze Him down to his elements, and then proceed to analyze the elements, for your failure may lead you on to take refuge in what is wholly indefinite, and what is wholly indefinite may leave you "without God and without hope in the world."

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

That they all may be one.

St. John xvii: 21.

It is worthy of notice, how constantly St. Paul compared the organized, visible Church of God, to the human body, and the work of the visible church to the exercise or action of our bodily members. "The Church" to St. Paul was what the physical frame of man is to the countless nerves and sinews and cells which go to form it; a summing-up of the great burning love of the Father; the work of Christ, the success of the Gospel; the hope of Christians. You do not hear St. Paul speaking of "the Gospel" as something wholly distinct from the Church, or from "Christianity," as if it were something outside of, and apart from organized church life. St. Paul did not write to "Christians"

at Corinth, or to "brethren" in Galatia, or to "disciples" at Thessalonica, but to "the Church at Corinth," the Church in Galatia, the Church at Thessalonica. That wondrous offspring of Jesus Christ, called elsewhere in holy Scripture, "the Church," "the Household of God;" "the Church of the living God; "the pillar and ground of the truth," and called in after years, as it spread itself over the known world, by that magnificent title that in ages of future unity will be realized in all its beauty "the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."

Hence there is nothing sadder, I think, to the true-hearted Christian than to stand midst the confusion and chaos of church life to-day; and look back to the early hours of the Church's history, when the children of the household sat round one common hearth and were sheltered in a common fold. What a glorious creation of God that undivided Church was! what a power for wondrous work, for burning zeal! for success, dispirited by no defeat! and for hope, depraved by no despondency! And what a miserable, pitiable wreck are we! Armies

going forth to fight a common enemy instead of one army, "the army of the living God." Armies that in the day of battle are without a unified plan—or worse still, armies that at times cease the fight against the common foe, to raise the shout of battle and draw the sword against each other; whilst Turk and Jew and heretic and infidel look on and say, sneeringly, "See how these Christians hate one another!" And yet Christ has prayed "that we may all be one."

Now, my friends, is there any hope of this prayer's fulfilment? Out through this night of churchly darkness are there any signs of the day-dawn of a better time? Are these armies drawing nearer to each other on peace intent, nearer than our fathers drew? Is the hope of brotherhood and union clearer? What are our hopes?

Has it ever struck you in the tremendousness of its power—that the fundamental doctrine of the old, undivided church body is alike common to every rent, torn-off or flung-off fiery ring. In some sense we all preach Christ. We can all still, thank God, stand on the common platform of the

Apostles' creed; and with united voice proclaim its teaching; as a faithful echo of the Holy Scriptures, which every form of of Christian faith believes in some way to have been inspired of God. We are not wholly sundered. Christ—a living personal Christ—is one strong strand in the frayed and torn rope that, mangled though it be, still links us all together.

Again, have you ever noticed how each sundered portion, revolving in its own newly found orbit, clings with iron grip to the old churchly idea, and proclaims with loud determined voice its apostolic and primitive character in some points. It is not the Greek, the Roman, or our own mother Church and her widespread children alone, that claim to be apostolic; the fact is that there is a certain light that you can hang every Christian body in: and if you view it in that light it stands out, judged by its claims, in what we might call clear, distinct, sharp-cut, formal churchism.

Thus the Baptist and the Plymouth brother are severe churchmen on the question of Baptism—severe as Rome is severe, re-bap-

tizing the already baptized and thus exalting the outward symbol to the highest possible position it could be exalted to, for with them the grace of baptism is little or nothing, the form consequently is everything.

In the same way the loyal old-fashioned Presbyterian is equally rigid on the divine and apostolic organization of presbyters ; the Congregationalist on the apostolic character of congregationalism, and the Plymouth brother—that Ishmael of Christianity—highest of all high churchmen, more papal even than the papacy in principle, believing in a divinely guided ministry, or in the divine illumination of the church body—no matter how small it may be—assembled together in any one place. We are not wholly sundered when you come to think of it. That great God-given churchly idea—that clinging to apostolicity and divine guidance—mangled though it may be, still abides in some shape, and forms another strong strand in the jagged rope that binds us yet together.

Again, have you ever noticed that, although the once united body has been torn, division has not brought about complete

paralysis of any one sundered portion. I know of no portion that has not at least the remnant of some old apostolic gift; I know of some, that have many, I do not know of one worth speaking of that is wholly bankrupt. And hence the utter folly of those Churches which justly claim historical succession, shutting their eyes to the fact that there are great, marvellous and wondrous gifts of God moving on the face of the mighty waters that roll outside their own orbits. We know it. We know that others have gifts that we pray for, and that we ourselves are wisely seeking to cultivate, and appropriate to ourselves. We are not wholly sundered. Lingering gifts, isolated, scattered, testify that we have not absorbed all that is apostolic and divine,

Now bearing these facts in mind, have you noticed how this century has seen a strange and wonderful cultivation and appropriation of gifts between divided brethren, how it has been a century of silent wonders.

It has seen the hoary Church of the East, cradled in Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria strike, at least outwardly, friendly hands with

the Church of England and her children; and, in the language of the church's earliest hours, pray a benediction on her labours.

It has seen Rome, tenacious as ever of spiritual imperialism, unable to retain, within her mighty grasp, the very flower of her cultivated intellect and no mean portion of her piety. Children that have risen with stately dignity from her feet and walked with steady step out of her fold, pitching their tents on some of the old lines of a primitive and undivided Church.

And when we come nearer home, is there nothing there worth noticing? What of Presbyterianism absorbing largely the spirit, if not the words, of the oldest liturgies; taking on its lips hymns consecrated by usage to what for centuries had been regarded as papal-like churches; and bearing those hymns aloft to God on the swell and harmonies of what was once considered an insult to holy worship?

What of the same mighty mass of religious life in places where its hold is strongest, leaving every granite block of its old doctrinal fortresses untouched, yet under the

shadow of their frowning walls; practically teaching a loving, tender, gentle gospel that I might preach to-morrow in my pulpit and be but a faithful exponent of Anglican doctrines.

What is he, elevated for a time above his brother presbyters; ruling vast legislative assemblies, called by a special name of dignity, signing documents to give them authority? He, without whom no ordination is æsthetically complete—a Bishop? No. But as these wondrous scientists, who live in the cloudland of hypotheses say, it might not be hard to predict what time, and development, and natural selection might make him. It has been said by some that the episcopate, which largely divides us, sprang from a like state of things in older days.

Again has there not been a cultivation and appropriation of gifts elsewhere and nearer.

What of the Church of England and her children appropriating to themselves and ever increasingly so, the bold enthusiasm, the earnest self-sacrifice, the devoted burning missionary zeal, and largely the simplicity of the early Methodists, whilst they freely

acknowledge that "they have no longer a monopoly of zealousness, and there has seldom been such a revival as that which has swept over the Church of England during the last half century." What of this same great religious power absorbing to itself, at least in large centres of population, the calmer spirit of Anglican worship, the gentler tone of public preaching, the architecture, largely the music of the old Mother that gave it birth, and that in a moment of puerperal madness flung it forth from her bosom instead of pressing it to her heart.

Now like all great changes, which ultimately result in permanency this absorption, assimilation, and capture of outside gifts, each from the other, has been carried on silently. Before this mighty American continent raised its giant outline above the gloomy waters, America was forming. For ages it grew on in ocean depths grain by grain, sand by sand, silently. Silent force, assimilation, combination, without noise of hammer, axe, or nail—thus God effects his mightiest and most enduring works and thus he may effect reunion.

Now comes the great question. What portion of the once united church will be foremost in calling together the isolated forces of God's elect that thus appear to be waiting for the summons? Surely the most gifted, and those who use their gifts the best.

We are gifted. Ours is the glory of lineage; ours is the boast of apostolicity and succession; ours are the growing fire and undying youth of age and years, that seems to know no lasting weakness. We are called by the name of no man however good or great, and we rest on creeds that were uttered by the parent Church before Ephraim flung himself off from Judah, and Judah turned his back on Ephraim.

Now let us stand on the eminence of these glorious gifts, and look on others who either have doubts as to the reality of them, or belittle their possession, and what do we see? Surely enough to teach us that we have not a monopoly of all gifts.

We see them toiling for Jesus, and victorious for Jesus. We see them side by side with us in distant lands, blessed and honoured by God as we are blessed. We dare not deny

their bravery, zeal, and devotion in the highest fields of Christian labour, for denial of their success, would be a stigma cast on the value of our own. Everywhere—in every branch of the great mission-field of God, through the darkness and the gloom that separates us, we hear voices like the voices of parted brothers, telling the same story that we are telling—preaching the same Jesus that we preach—whilst through the dark clouds, for the moment lifted, we see a cross upheld by other hands, and it is the duplicate of the cross that we are holding; and round that cross, which is not ours, we hear the tramp of thousands of human souls, just the same as the noise of life around our own.

Now it is madness—positive madness—to deny the existence of these gifts, to shut our eyes to the tremendous fact, once so hard to believe, but that every year makes more apparent, that outside of apostolic order there may be apostolic blessings; if only there be apostolic zeal and apostolic work. God's glorious promise to his holy church, "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the world,"

is not a promise to be read solely in the light of locality. Where are the apostolic churches of Laodicea, Ephesus, and Sardis? where are the four hundred and forty-six bishoprics that once cast light on the darkness of Africa? What of the message to one of the first-born churches of apostolic labours? "Hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown?"

O my brethren, our most striking gifts are great, magnificent and glorious, but there is not one of them—apostolicity, order, succession—that is not locally contingent on work and zeal and earnestness and devotion to our risen Lord. Work like that of the great apostle which leaves its mark on the body—the zeal that furnishes martyrs—the lavish outpouring of earth's treasures in obedience to the command "Go, preach the gospel to every creature," these are the gifts that never die, and these are gifts that no sane child of an historic Church would dare to say belonged solely and alone to him.

The most gifted, who use gifts to the best advantage, will in the nature of things raise the standard of unity and we are not alone

in the field of gifts. But we are in a magnificent position in that field if we are only true to our God. Our colours, ragged and torn, have been seen distinct and plain through all the Christian centuries. We have stood first amongst the cleansers of the defiled temple—and our power is felt—now, through a heroic Selwyn ; again, through a martyred Patteson, and yet again through a martyr Hannington, and our voices are heard "in the fields that are white to harvest." But this whole world has to be conquered for Jesus — dare we say that we are doing it alone ? Let us not boast of apostolicity and succession from the apostles, just though the boast may be, but down in the dust and thick of battle let us so follow the White Horse, and its heavenly Rider ; that those who see not with us now may be forced to cry, "These are the apostles of the closing ages, follow them." Let us not glory in words of order and records of history, however noble, but let us storm idolatry and stand before kings, and go down the dark valley, if needs be, with the step of a St. Paul and the love of a St. John. Let us live to

make history, not to rest on history that others may have made for us.

And, believe me, ours is the opportunity. Faces once turned from us with disdain are looking towards us; hands once mailed as if in iron glove are loosening, slowly it may be, but surely; hearts once hardened with hereditary hate are growing softer; whilst over all this strange, mysterious change, consecrating it, baptizing it, brooding over it, surely is the Spirit of God, and the echo of the prayer that must—in time—be answered, "that we all may be one."

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Perfect through sufferings.

Hebrews ii : 10.

Amongst the many mysteries that enter into our daily existence and seem literally to hem us in as human beings, there are few greater than the mysteries of human suffering, of physical pain, of bodily disease. The mystery makes itself apparent to our senses by the somewhat appalling fact that pain and suffering seem to make no discrimination between the subjects on which they operate. The best and purest, the holiest and noblest, the most saint-like and Christ-like constantly suffer years of pain as well as the flagrantly wicked, the immoral and depraved. In the case of the latter one can see a reason for pain and consequent suffering. In such cases patients constantly create

their own bodily sufferings, they sin against their own bodies, and their bodies rise up against them in a spirit of terrible vengeance and seem to say, "You have desecrated us and now we will scourge you." If in such cases the effect is terrible, the cause is equally apparent.

But in the other cases although the suffering is as palpable the cause seems wholly hidden. Here is one whose life has been essentially a good life, though perhaps not a faultless one. In the relationships of husband and father, of friend and master he has been all that love and friendship and service could well ask for, and religiously he has done his best, quietly and unostentatiously to believe and live as Christ would have him live and believe. Now why should such a man, such a woman, suffer as much as the depraved and godless? Why should each fathom depths of suffering at times, that wring and wrench the hearts of those who love them as they stand round the bed, all eyes, all bleeding hearts, all useless. If God is a God of love, why does He allow it? If God knows the difference between good

and evil, why does He permit the good, as far as pain is concerned, to come down to the level of the evil man, so that if both were lying in beds beside each other in the ward of a hospital, it would be hard for a skilled nurse to say which was the greater sufferer. This apparent lack of discrimination is so palpable that mourners all full of love and pity themselves, have been often led to say "if that is an evidence of God's love, if that is the result of God's will and the reward of a good life, I will have nothing to say to God or good, I will eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow I die."

Now it is one of the peculiarities of the Bible, as expressive of the will of God, that it never seeks to solve problems or explain mysteries—probably because we would not be in any way the better if the problem were solved and the mystery unfolded. The Bible accepts mysteries as facts, it never explains them. It takes sin for granted as an awful fact and proceeds, not to explain the mystery of sin, but to show how God's love for us led to his providing a means whereby we can escape finally the victorious influence of sin.

It takes bodily pain and suffering for granted and proceeds to show "how all things work together for good to them that love God," and how "our light affliction, which (as compared with an eternity of happiness) is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." In short the Bible explains no problem, lifts no mystery, but meets both for our happiness here and our eternity hereafter.

How does it meet the mystery of the suffering of the holy? How does it answer the natural yet petulant cry of those who would arraign God for injustice and cruelty?

First, It teaches those who look on as the godly suffer, that the life of the sufferer is not confined to the four walls of a sick room or to the bed on which he dies. It definitely, distinctly, unmistakably teaches that death for the godly sufferer is but the door into that real life beyond in the presence of God which God's love has prepared for us. That life in which there shall be "no more pain," nor mourning, nor crying; that life to which our Saviour referred when he said to the thief as death was stealing over them, "to-

day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," "in the Paradise of God"; that life of which St. Stephen had a foretaste as with "face like that of an angel he looked up into heaven and saw"—yes, "saw,"—"the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, to whom he cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit;" that life which is not confined to months of suffering within the four walls of a room, and that life the Bible reveals to us with certainty.

Again the Bible plainly teaches that as a child is educated, fitted for future life by books, so I may be fitted, you fitted for the paradise of God by suffering. Whilst there is but one road to glory, there are many ways of fitting people for the ultimate glory itself, and suffering and pain are unquestionably one way. As the man Christ, our Lord, we are told "was made perfect through suffering," and because of "suffering crowned with glory," the wretchedness of Calvary was a step towards perfection, and the bitterness of death nobly borne was "perfection's crown." And as with the master so with the servant.

The best type of Christian comes out of the furnace of affliction; the grandest because the most peaceful death-beds are often those where he who dies has suffered patiently and suffered long. His very suffering that no human art could lighten has flung the sick man back on God, has opened his heart in prayer, has developed his faith and trust, has day by day weaned him from this world and made the world beyond, to him, a world of reality. His suffering has made him gentle and patient and singularly submissive to the will of God, calm where all else are troubled, the one tearless being in a room of tears. If he could speak to us from the world of painlessness, we may feel sure that he would say, as David once said, "It was well for me that I was afflicted; I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are righteous and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me;" or with his Master say, "I have learned obedience by the things I have suffered, I have seen the travail of my soul, the painful road I have journeyed, and as I look back I am satisfied."

Yes, we are "made perfect through suffer-

ing." Why? I know not, but God knows —"the sowing may be in tears but the harvest is one of joy." "If any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed." "If we suffer, we will also reign with Him." Our "light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."

So teaches the Word of God, and hence when at times in our grief we think hard things of God and say hard things, let us stop and strive to think of what is seldom and sometimes never thought of in connection with the death of one who has suffered awfully yet died peacefully.

First, that pain and suffering are never the reward of a good life, and that it is unjust to say "If that be the reward of a good life I will have none of it." That is not the reward; the reward is in our Saviour's words, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." The reward is not in God letting his "Holy one see corruption," but in the thought that cheers the dying as they look into death, "Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; in thy right hand

there are pleasures for evermore." That is the reward.

Again, when you think hardly of what to you seems "the cruelty" of suffering and the "bitterness" of death—realize that, as a rule, he, or she who bore the suffering and tasted the bitterness did not complain. Nay, as you look back at such a death-bed, what strikes you as the strangest fact in connection with it, is, that the sufferer never complained. Why did not he, she, cry out: "Ah! if this be my reward, I will have none of it?" Because the sufferer knew it was not his reward, because he felt, what God grant we all may feel as the hand of death rudely or gently touches us, "I am falling asleep with Christ on earth, to awake with Christ in paradise."

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